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BIOPHILIC DESIGN,
CO-LIVING WITH NATURE
AND OUR HUMAN LOVE
OF LIFE**

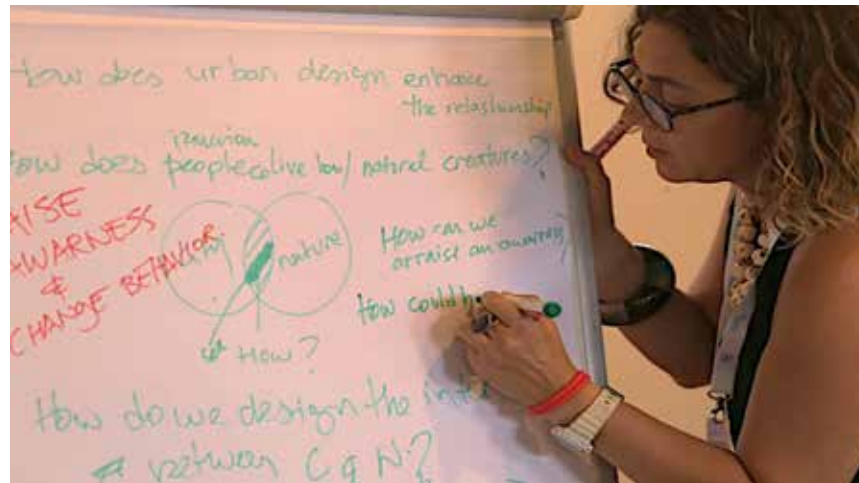
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THOMAS GARVEY: BIOPHILIC DESIGN, CO-LIVING WITH NATURE AND OUR HUMAN LOVE OF LIFE

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The recent [World Design Talk](#) organized in Izmir (Turkey) in June 2018 provided a special opportunity to discuss and debate, under the umbrella topic of 'Co-living', the sub-topic of Co-Living with Nature which required thinking beyond the artifacts, constructions, and products and systems created solely by humans. [Thomas Garvey](#), World Design Organization Board member, and Associate Professor at [Carleton University](#) (Canada), shares his thoughts on biophilic design and designing with nature in the context of our special Co-living series.



What does it really mean to live with nature?

Are we not ourselves part of nature? Why do so many of our large metropolitan citizens feel so cut off from nature? Regrettably, we recognize that too much of our modern society is experienced as artificial and separate from nature, and too many of our everyday settings afford us minimal contact with natural forces. How can design integrate principles and methods to better balance our human relationships with nature? As could be expected some of the best questions came from the open-minded inquiries of students.



‘Biophilic design’ is an approach to designing human environments that recognizes that our fundamental human experience, over the majority of evolutionary time, has been that of adaptation with natural forces.

Our fitness, levels of health, and the increased productivity of our activities over time have depended on our interconnectedness with nature.

Today we look for ways to design our environments that bring us into more frequent and sustainable interactions with nature. We strive to avoid the superficial or symbolic gestures for the sake of appearance. The integration of natural elements should reinforce the healthy use of our spaces and be well considered in the planning stages from start to finish.

We explore how air and water, plants and landscapes, materials and colors, and shapes and textures can be integrated in ways that reinforce our positive experiences with our environments. This applies to settings from our most intimate and personal spaces, those we share for work and professional lives, and to our communities and cities.



Biophilic design is an innovative and rapidly expanding area of study, research, and practice in design.

At the same time it is complex with many developing and at times diverse interpretations. The great potential however rests on the underlying theory, which was first developed in the fields of biology, psychology, and philosophy.

‘Biophilia’ means ‘love of life’

Theorists describe it as a biologically rooted, sub-conscious, and innate urge for humans to be connected to the rest of natural non-human living systems. It has been expressed as far back as the Greek philosophers.

In his 1984 book [Biophilia](#), the eminent biologist and theorist Edward O. Wilson introduced the biophilia hypothesis and defined it as “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life”.



As a student I remember the excitement of reading these ideas and one very important moment in a final year seminar on the topic of ‘Design and Nature’.

After long discussions with professors and peers, and presentations that demonstrated how perfected design in nature was, the day ended with the acknowledgement that the forces of evolution meant that even the best would again be improved with time.

This insight has continued to serve as a metaphor of the great potential in our design fields and, more importantly, the even greater potential in our students and young professionals.

Like so many topics, which only a generation ago were just the focus of a single class or seminar, biophilic design has expanded to become an entire field of design. At the same time students and young designers are engaging in greater numbers and developing expertise in the area. These new developments promise faster learning and offer the hope of more rapid generation of solutions that will make very real contributions to everyone’s quality of life.



ABOUT THOMAS GARVEY

Thomas Garvey is an associate professor in the School of [Industrial Design at Carleton University](#) and was the director of the School of Industrial Design at Carleton from 2007 to 2017. He is currently a Board member of the [World Design Organization](#).

Professor Garvey's research focuses on industrial design for extreme and minimal environments, small-scale living spaces and urban density, integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in design curricula, and international collaborations. Professor Garvey graduated from Carleton with a Bachelor of Industrial Design. He obtained an MSc in Communications Design from Pratt Institute in New York and a PhD in Architectural Planning from the University of Tokyo.

*More information on Thomas Garvey:
<https://carleton.ca/id/profile/thomas-garvey/>*

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