



Consider for a moment why some spaces immediately create a sense of comfort or curiosity, while others create a sense of unease and restlessness. Some even offer a feeling of rejuvenation.

The lofty fluted space of a colossal stone cathedral, so naturally and acoustically tuned, with filtered light cascading through stained-glass windows, engenders in many a sense of awe; for others, a sense of repose.

The Aspen Dancing Fountain (aspendancingfountain.com) draws thousands of summer visitors who interact and play with the irregular plumes of rising and falling water. Similarly, people gravitate to a tree flickering shade onto a sunlit bench.

Our bodies respond to these places; our psyches find well-being. Neuroscientist Colin Ellard was among the first to discover, through scientific research, that dull, unimaginative environments increase heart rates and raise cortisol levels, the main component of stress.

Environments with variety and features distracting the eye activate curiosity, stimulating both mind and body. Walter Paepcke and Herbert Bayer intuitively understood this concept when they sketched plans for the Aspen Institute campus (aspeninstitute.org). The campus and buildings weave into the landscape, deliberately engaging our views, embracing interior daylighting and encompassing artful distraction. The design fosters their vision of body, mind and spirit, enabling the visitor to reap the benefits of the campus' intention.

The same design principle applies to the Aspen Art

MINDFUL PLACES

Architect Jim Kehoe offers insight into the psychology of space.

By Jim Kehoe

Museum (aspenartmuseum.org). The day-lit rooftop cafe exemplifies the indoor-outdoor experience, connecting the visitor to place and nature, as a social nexus and as a haven for quiet reflection.

These environments lower blood pressure and reduce heart rate, spurring better cognitive function, attention and memory. With 90 percent of all human experience occurring within the "built environment," neuroscientists are digging deeper through brain scan technology (fMRI) and wearable monitoring devices to measure mind-body reactions.

Natural daylight activates the neural pathways to the circadian rhythm, which controls melatonin, signaling our hormones and organs, all indebted to the 24-hour cycle. Now, residential design favors walls of glass over punched-out window openings.

Bright, unconventional buildings with massive amounts of daylight and views make a difference. When applied to hospitals, patients recover faster. Over time, these everyday environmental effects have lasting impacts to our well-being.

Next time you notice how good you feel walking in or around a space, take note. The well-designed space is a gift.

From left: The Aspen Chapel, designed by architect George Edward Heneghan and influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, instills calm; the Cafe inside the Aspen Art Museum is drenched in light that flows through the walls' woven design, and the wood truss roof with skylights adds a playful element.