



BIOPHILIC DESIGN

THE DESIRE TO CONNECT WITH NATURE CAN SPELL SALES FOR LBM DEALERS.

BY MIKE BERGER

The famous naturalist John Muir once said, “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity.” What if this feeling could be experienced every day? That’s the idea behind biophilic design, a concept introduced by E.O. Wilson, a biologist and university research professor emeritus at Harvard who put forth the idea that humans instinctively strive to experience nature in everyday life.

At its core, biophilic design attempts to create a sense of harmony between us and our homes, and promises a slew of well-being benefits. “Numerous studies have concluded that surrounding ourselves with natural wood products, such as redwood, enhances our overall physical and mental wellbeing,” says Jessica Hewitt, director of marketing for Humboldt Sawmill Company. “It has also been shown to increase productivity in working and learning. Thus, the remote or hybrid employee and children studying or learning at home can all benefit from being surrounded by natural wood, and what could be more natural than beautiful and sustainable redwood.”

ACHIEVING NATURAL CONNECTIONS

Biophilic design is rapidly finding its way into home building and remodeling thanks to its therapeutic benefits—especially important as more people than ever are spending extended time at home in a post-COVID-19 world.

“In the past, biophilic design was considered niche, expensive, and generally limited to high end buildings/industrial settings,” says Kim Guimond, chief administrative and marketing officer for Modern Mill, the manufacturer of ACRE decking, siding, and trim boards. “There’s too much evidence pointing to the positive effects of biophilic design on one’s well-being for all of us in the A&D/LBM community not to try to find ways to scale it and make it accessible in any environment from high end condos and offices to Amazon warehouses and multi-family housing so these benefits are accessible to all. Innovations in simulated nature from innovative wood alternatives to lightbulbs that mimic sunlight make it possible.”

This connection is achieved in part through the use of natural materials, larger windows and patio doors that allow more of the outside world to be seen from inside a structure,



LEFT: A vacation home on Harrison Lake, British Columbia, was extensively remodeled using clear redwood from Humboldt Sawmill Company and includes a covered outdoor kitchen, fireplace, seating, and dining areas.

PHOTO BY ATTILIO FIUMARELLA

RIGHT: Ply Gem Perspective Multi-Slide Vinyl Patio Doors provide large, unobstructed views that allow the outside world to be experienced from inside. Ply Gem Perspective offers pocket, bypass, and bi-parting configurations, as well as custom sizes up to 10' tall or 30' wide.



As Modern Mill points out, biophilic design is not necessarily about incorporating plants into a living space. Rather, it's about incorporating elements such as water, stone, and wood that signal to our nervous system that our wellbeing/needs are met, as shown here with the company's ACRE bead board used as a ceiling cladding.

and ancillary products that help create the living spaces that bring the outside in. "Windows and doors are key elements of biophilic design, allowing for natural light to enter a home while providing panoramic views, ventilation and passage to the outdoors, ultimately helping to connect homeowners to nature," explains Andy Karr, senior product manager for Cornerstone Building Brands windows.

These natural connections can be achieved through the use of the small as well as of the large, manufacturers point out, especially when they are part of a thoughtful design approach. "LBM dealers should know that to have success incorporating biophilic design into a product, and to sell a consumer on biophilic design, it needs to be authentic and realistic," Katie Sponseller, corporate decorative glass designer for ODL, Inc., points out. "It doesn't always need to be as overt as a green wall or an indoor water feature. Something as simple as increasing natural light in a home is a great example. ODL seeks to merge the interior of your home with the outdoors with stylized, privacy, and clear doorglass styles. Biophilic design can also show up in natural textures and biomimicry, such as ODL's textured privacy glass, Rain."



SELLING THE CONCEPT

Exemplary examples of biophilic design can be found in large, grandiose structures such as the "Vertical Forest" by Stefano Boeri Architects, residential towers in Milan, Italy, that contain 400 condominiums along with more than 900 trees, 5,000 shrubs, and 11,000 perennials. The reality, however, is that few builders are capable of duplicating such structures, and rare is the LBM dealer that could support such an endeavor.

This doesn't mean, however, that LBM dealers can't benefit from biophilic design. "This is a great conversation starter with the A&D community," says Guimond. "Consider Lunch and Learns, AIA presentations, and architects toolboxes available from manufacturers like Modern Mill as door openers and value adds to help this community break traditional barriers and begin systematically incorporating the principles of biophilic design into all designs and extending these benefits to all and in the most unexpected places."

Manufacturers suggest LBM dealers can take advantage of this design trend by educating their customers about on-trend product options and their value. "As a selling tool, consider that natural light and connection to the outdoors improves the value of a home or building," says Sponseller. "Thoughtfully placed windows and doorglass increase natural light, and well-lighted spaces appear larger and more open."

Dealers can further leverage the growing trend of biophilic design by ensuring they have an appropriate assortment of products, says Karr. "Products like large format, multi-slide patio doors address several of the biophilic design principles," he explains. "Displaying products such as these in a dealer's showroom often creates an inspiring focal point that allows for sales associates to engage customers and demonstrate how these products create a gateway to the outdoors."

By leaning into biophilic design, LBM dealers can offer on-trend choices their customers may not have previously considered, while simultaneously improving the bottom line through increased sales. And in the end, the places created will, as John Muir penned, provide a place of personal sanctuary: "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." ■