

My childhood home—a New England style saltbox with grey clapboard siding and black shutters—was built by my great-grandfather. The windows and doors were white, the surrounding magnolias and ornamental cherry trees reflecting varying shades of green. Long garden beds spanned the backyard, lined with boxwoods. Warm reds, oranges, and yellows fill the spaces of my memory, sunlight flashes through my mind's eye, and the chill of the stone of the kitchen floor can almost be felt again. Many of my childhood memories are rooted in this house, the new occupants of a past reality. Our old home retains an emotional value that supported our family's life, within a built environment of architecture and interiors. It was our domestic landscape, to which all my experiences took hold. The furnishings reflected our family in the heirloom furniture and in the residue of our life that pervaded every space. It reflected the light that shaped my imagination, it held the air that suspended a symphony of smells that was uniquely ours. This house was more than just wood and cement and painted walls, for it represented much more than a family home. The house was represented the fertile grounds for cultivating our sense of place – the origin of our identity as a family.

Architecture and interior design are in a permanent relationship, one cannot successfully exist without the others' support. The architecture interacts with its natural surroundings and the interior with both the surroundings and the architecture itself, in a synergy that comprises the built world. The elements of architecture and interior design, from light and color to historical references, serve its occupants emotionally and psychologically, in ways that usually relate to the intended purpose of the building. The office building is created to make the most efficient work space for employees. Though this efficiency sounds strictly utilitarian, it cannot be detached from the goal of optimal emotional health of the workers, which is closely tied to their conscious or unconscious reaction to their environment. Like any art, architecture and interior design are not necessary to life itself, but they are necessary “in the same way in which any kind of art matters: it makes life better” (Goldberger 2). Both of these art forms, when carried out in conjunction with our emotional needs, can add more meaning to our interactions with the built world.

Architecture and interior design are the manmade skeletons for light and space, arguably some of the most evasive and mysterious concepts, whose full definitions and properties are still being discovered. Design often reflects one's best attempts to harness the qualities of light in space in new ways, often stirring our spiritual consciousness in the process. Visible light is characterized by the color spectrum, which is both physical and non-physical, found very tangibly on every physical surface, but also in the mass-less streams of yellow sunlight. Though there is no common experience for color; many studies show that there are common associations with color that are ingrained in our subconscious from birth; as Frank Mahnke states, “The messages conveyed by signal coloration are of infinite variety, and we can be certain that they played a critical role in the evolution of the human species” (Mahnke 12). With a rich language of symbology, color gives interior design the ability to tell a story. Color psychology is the study of one's emotional and behavioral response, a response to our ingrained associations with color that stem from a mix of instinctual and experiential interactions with color in the world. In this way, color is tied deeply to our mentality, and with its roots in emotion, has the power to transport us out of physical experiences into our imagination. Color “is not just dependent on the external world, but may also originate through the power of imagination of our inner world” (Mahnke 7). Color is in constant conversation with our psyche, delivering information about our surroundings and translating our surroundings into emotional responses – studies show that green and blue light thwarts activity in mice, pink light makes rats more aggressive, and chicken lay



more eggs under red light. The use of blue light to infant jaundice has also standard medical practice for decades (Mahnke 12). Color vision evolved for survival purposes in all animals, therefore humans' full-spectrum vision is necessary for survival, as "Living creatures only see or sense those energies (colors) needed for survival" (Mahnke 13). Colors are part of the memory we are born with, they are "primordial images" (Mahnke 14) creating instinctual reactions. As Frank Mahnke states, "a dull environment tends to make us turn to our inner self, since the exterior provides no simulation," (Mahnke 28), creating environments that differ in comfort for introverts and extroverts, who prefer varying amounts of stimulation. Although there is a need for variety in design, the conclusion can be drawn that: The extroverted personality type has a greater inclination toward more intensive stimulation, and consequently enjoys more colorful surroundings . . . On the other hand, because introverts are very sensitive to stimulation and have a great need for privacy and calm, they manage best in environments with a lower degree of stimulation (Mahnke 28). Considering the impact color psychology can make in an environment can shift the way we think about crafting interiors, as an introvert may desire a predominately low-stimulating home environment and an extrovert may desire a predominately highly-stimulating home environment, to suit their emotional needs, respectively. Professor Sidney Perkowitz studies optics and light's presence and significance in art. His love for light goes beyond the laboratory – he explores how the visual arts can catch and manipulate light to carry "heightened reality to [his] mind" (Perkowitz 2). He sees the world in moving patterns of intensities and admires artist's ability to manipulate light, and as he explores in his book, *Empire of Light*, one of the fundamental aspects of light's power lies in its ability to act as both a wave and a particle. This wave-particle duality points to light's performance as a deep and powerful

catalyst for human emotion. Photons are the only particle “to which humans directly and regularly respond” (Perkowitz 6), and are mass-less and live forever. As Sidney succinctly puts it, “Light is truly the intangible, perfect particle.” (Perkowitz 6). Light’s physical power lies in its wavelength, its force in its crests and troughs. Is it any wonder that light carries such significant spiritual weight? Light is an eternal and physically weightless substance, but all earthly light is dependent on solar radiation; as Jacob Moleschitt declares, life is “woven out of air by light” (Perkowitz 4), making life’s relationship with light a pivotal one. Light and space and its challenges in interpretation have fascinated artists for centuries, eventually forming a whole genre of artists based in L.A. whose work focuses solely on the transformative properties of manipulating light and space. Light itself carries unresolved enigmas as its mass-less and immortal nature is a scientific phenomena, making it an attractive candidate for artistic inquiry. James Turrell Retrospective at the LACMA, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Guggenheim in 2013 took the art world by force (Hylton), with his minimal, yet highly technical light installations. His exhibitions explored nearly fifty years of his work, as a key artists of the Light and Space movement of the 1960’s and 70’s. His most sensational work came out of a collaboration with Dr. Ed Wortz and Robert Irwin. Much of their work focused on experiences in the anechoic chamber, a chamber that removed all visual and aural stimuli. Turrell’s show in 2013 expanded this idea with installations which manipulated colored light to create an altered perception of space, making light’s transportive properties the sole subject of the installation, to show light as “an engine of enlightenment” (Poundstone). As James Turrell once said, “Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.” Isolating and concentrating the illusory powers of light make Turrell’s installations so powerful – he takes the established scientific knowledge of light and uses it to evoke very primal emotions, forcing the viewer to be present and engage with the environment immediately. This reaction creates a strong connection between the viewer and their environment, with only the power of light.

With a perspective on both psychological and historical significance, architecture and interior design weave together stories about both the user and their past. Jefferson’s vision of neoclassicism in a young America is reflected in his architecture at Monticello and University of Virginia. His style was derived from the architecture of Classical antiquity, the Vitruvian principles and the architecture of the Italian architect Andrea Palladio. He used the symbology of the temple for The Rotunda library of UVA, an intentional reference to the church that reflected his devotion to books, and belief in separation of church and state. As he became part of building the government of the United States of America, his architecture reflected his sense of self, specifically with a respect for the Greek and Roman democratic forms and his own political views. The reflection of culture and conversation with history represents an important part of design, as constantly changing social and technological progression marks new periods of design. A mix of historical elements and contemporary reflections tell a narrative of culture through the architecture and interior design. Whether a home is intentionally decorated or not, it is representational of a family’s culture and history and is symbolic of a starting point. Homes create a sense of place, which create the foundation for a strong sense of identity. I attribute my solidarity in character to the structure of my family home to provide the domestic context that I need to frame the rest of my life. Both architecture and interior design provide the foundation for the human experience, the structure to hold one’s dreams and the interiors for which one’s memories to catch hold, and it is vital that these art forms are accessible so that the opportunity to ground oneself and our culture in design is not lost. As Gaston Bachelard puts it, “the house shelters day dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace”

(Bachelard 6). The house's protective role not only shelters us from a harsh climate, but also houses and protects our dreams.

The 1950's was a pivotal time in the shaping of the contemporary domestic form, as free standing houses started becoming more affordable due to mass-production of homes in suburb-style communities. This new push towards free-standing houses, in bucolic settings, reflected a shift towards a stronger connection with the home and environment. The house became detached from the workplace, with these new mass-production techniques redefining the ideal home. The house became more closely tied with nature and yards became standard, with developers envisioning "communities of single-family homes in parklike developments, with abundant trees and greenery, open space, and rolling, curvilinear streets that followed the landscape" (Gioielli). The iconic ranch surrounded by ample yard symbolized the new standard middle-class housing, a cultural shift evident in home design. New funding from President Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act spurred the construction of a vast highway system, and Henry Ford's Model T "not only made the car affordable to millions of working and middle-class Americans in the early 20th century, but also opened up millions of acres for suburban development creating an easier commute from city work to suburban home" (Gioielli). Instead of renting an apartment in the dirty, crowded city, you could buy a brand new house in the suburbs, including a garage and yard. Low interest rates, the G.I. Bill (which allowed veterans to buy homes through a federal loan), and new building techniques made suburban homes affordable to the middle class. Cities, with "little open space and available parkland" became unhealthy and popular culture started to "glamorize suburban life" (Kenney). This transition in domestic life placed importance on contact with nature, allowing each homeowner to own their own plot of land with a lawn and garden, "providing a semirural retreat from urban life" (Gioielli). Not only did suburbs detach themselves from the urban form, but they also tied homes back to a healthier natural setting. With more attention on domesticity and a healthy living environment, the emotional value of home as the foundation for a strong family life was pushed into the spotlight. Not only was the setting of the home considered, but also the idea of the hearth being central to the home, which became evident in the design of early suburbs like Levittown, where Frank Lloyd Wright's open three-way brick fireplace design was the main feature of the living room in one of the house models (Community). This focus on gathering spaces in the home supported the ideas of being present and connected in the home.

Moshe Sadfie's TED talk, "Reinventing the Apartment Building," explores the complication of increasingly dense cities and the preservation of green space. Moshe marries the concept of a suburban home and the apartment building, with high-rise buildings whose living units included garden space and maximum sunlight exposure. Moshe's buildings highlight permeability and the function of public space in a community, with gardens, parks, and paths integrated into the architecture. He opens up the surface of the building to receive light and air flow, while maximizing the usable space and footprint of the building (Sadfie).

Xavier Vilalta, another architect, explores similar themes in his TED talk. Taking inspiration from the open-air markets in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and exploring the function of the outdoors to create activity, he reinvented a shopping mall that emphasizes the building's connection with its environment and used a perforated covering to maximize air flow (Vilalta). These two architects argue that contact with nature is imperative to a healthy living environment. Our connection with our local environment is not only strengthened through contact with nature, but one of the effects of increased sunlight exposure is the increase "of the mood-lifting chemical serotonin on sunny days" (Unraveling). We cannot detach ourselves with our connection to



sunlight and plant life. This interaction with our environment is an important psychological need that architecture and interior design must address.

As Paul Goldberger examines in his book *Why Architecture Matters*, architecture serves both emotional and symbolic purposes. Though it is not necessary for survival, great architecture can “help heal and to teach by creating a comfortable and uplifting environment . . . though it may not sustain life, [it] can give the already sustained life meaning” (Goldberger 2). Architecture and interior design can transgress physical needs to serve a greater philosophical purpose, to bring engagement and connection with our built world. Not only does it serve us emotionally, architecture has created important symbology in our modern world – the traditional architecture of banks serves of a powerful symbol of protection, and even as we move into an age of digital banking, the traditional bank symbol is still used as an icon of monetary security. Traditional architecture and interiors on a larger scale can unleash a sense of past, sparking conversations between generations symbolized in design. Architecture is so communicative in its historical references and literary in its experience that Frank Lloyd Wright even referred to the most important pieces of architecture as “great granite books . . . the universal writing of humanity” (Goldberger 32). Architecture holds great power in its ability to preserve history and a community’s ideals in its style and structure. Beyond its purpose as shelter, the spaces inside and outside of architecture tell stories of modern history. Though much of the built world may not be built to serve psychological needs as its primary goal, the sheer physicality and our constant interaction with it manifests itself in an emotional response. If we consider its psychological and historical significance, as well as its practical purpose, architecture and interior spaces begin to hold much more meaning beyond their brick and mortar definition.

As Sigmund Freud honestly declares, “the dwelling-house was a substitute for my mother’s womb” (Máté 25). This statement perfectly illustrates the importance of home – especially in our early years. The home includes much more than the actual structure of a house, but the frame of the house and its interiors provides the framework for family life. In *A Reasonable Life*, Ferenc Máté considers the state of domesticity in the modern world and the importance of a stable dwelling. He makes the observation that with too many rooms, families can forget how to be a family. The solution to mending this disconnect lies in the superfluousness of our obsession with comfort. Instead, we should be focused on the notion of house and hearth, and the ideals of a true *casa* – the kitchen being the heart of the house. The average new home is nearly “50% larger today—1900 square feet against 1350—than it was just twenty years ago” (Máté 35). We’ve lost touch with how our home can serve the family – by bringing us together, encouraging connectivity, and creating a sense of place.

I recently visited the home of Celia Tejada, Chief Creative Officer at Restoration Hardware in San Francisco, previously Senior Vice President of Design at Williams Sonoma. Celia comes from a small Spanish village, and her vision of design stems from her deeply engrained sense of self and home. Her home exudes authenticity – it fulfills her vision of unpretentious comfort whose energy centers around the kitchen. Above her stove hangs a sign that says “the kitchen is the heart of the home.” She believes that the home “is a destination for my family, a place they can feel safe but also expand their wings.” She believes in being fearless in your home – creating a space that is truly you. She says, “Home is a very private thing, so I go



by feeling, and I don't take myself too seriously” (Serrell). Celia’s a passionate visionary whose work allows her to celebrate comfortable homes that center around entertaining and family life. Her vision of home reflects herself, in a predominately black and white palette with pops of red and orange. The chandeliers are large often-center in the room, and there are faux fur pillows and throws everything. The result is a space that feels truly inviting and comfortable. From the architecture to the interiors, her home brings people together and exudes Celia’s sense of place.

Just as Celia’s home reflected her sense of place and self, at the Frieze Art Frame in London, Helly Nahmad Gallery created a showroom that considered the context for art in interiors with a highly personalized home. The booth recreated the Paris apartment of a fictional Italian art collector in 1968, complete with personal paraphernalia and dirty dishes in the kitchen sink (Clawson). The apartment represented an avid art collector, and the context of the art was his messy home. The interior design of the apartment told a story about the art collector, the time period of the setting, and created a story around each piece of art. Each room of the apartment illustrated its suggested occupant in a fully detailed rendering. Not only did every singular possession add new layers of understanding to his character, but the combinations and layout of his furnishings in the rooms gave a complete picture. The showroom perfectly showcased the power of interior design to tell stories and reflect the self.

Gaston Bachelard, author and philosopher of the book *The Poetics of Space*, believes space and architecture are the embodiment of our day-dreams and memories, and remarks on the importance of having a space for your dreams to occupy. He describes the house as “the topography of our intimate being” (Bachelard xxxvi), being closely tied to our soul. Comparing houses to poetry, he explores the artistic characteristics of space through the human mind. The close relationship with memory and space is described when Gaston says “something closed much retina our memories ... by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets” (Bachelard 6). Our memories are tied to the home, their relationship weaving together a poetry of imagery-rich recollection. Spaces are necessary to hold our dreams, to catch our dreams and visualize our memories. From historical symbology to color psychology, to establishing a sense of place, architecture and interior design work in harmony to create spaces that transcend physical structures.

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