

# Mind-changing architecture

If you could choose to live anywhere with any view from the window, what would you choose? Many people would say a room with a view of nature; few would choose to look out on an urban landscape. Now scientists are investigating the effect that buildings can have on our moods with new technologies and sophisticated instruments to provide empirical evidence of these effects.

Which would you prefer – a room with a high ceiling or a low one? It could depend on whether you want to feel relaxed and think freely and creatively (a high ceiling) or focus on more detailed work (a low ceiling). But don't go for a very low ceiling as this could lead to stress. However, it seems to be more a question of how high the ceiling 'feels' as the use of light colour paint or mirrors to make the room look bigger can produce the same effect.

At school were you ever told off for staring out of the window and not paying attention? Well maybe the teachers got it wrong. Rather than distracting you, views of nature actually seem to improve your concentration. Tests with students have shown improved academic results when students could see green spaces. Some scientists have suggested this might be because people have a natural tendency to respond positively to nature.

What about furniture? Which would you prefer – curved objects or sharp-angled objects? It seems that most people prefer curved objects. One explanation for this is that in nature sharp objects are more likely to be dangerous and so we have a natural liking for more rounded shapes.

Colour can also influence how you feel, so choose blue for a calming effect, yellow to feel more carefree, green to reduce stress and orange for enthusiasm. But avoid red as a main colour as it can make you restless and dark blue as it can make you feel sad.

It's not just humans that are affected by their environment. Apparently, mice kept in a stimulating environment with a change of 'furniture' actually grow new brain cells. As the brains of mice are similar to those of humans, maybe we should change our furniture around more regularly.

So next time you're moving house or furnishing a home, think carefully about the views, the shape, colour and contents of the rooms as it could make all the difference to your well-being.

**1** Before reading the text, think about the effect buildings can have on people – think about the view from the window, the rooms, the furniture and the colours. Discuss your ideas with a partner.

**2** Now read the text. How many of your ideas from exercise 1 are talked about in the text?

**3** Read the article again and summarise the main points about the following.

1 The effect of the height of the ceiling.

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2 The effect of the view out of the window.

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3 The effect of the shape of the furniture.

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4 The effect of colours.

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5 The effect of a stimulating environment on mice.

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4 Without looking at the text, see if you can remember the actual word used in the text, to replace the words in brackets with the same meaning.

- 1 Few people would choose to look out on an \_\_\_\_\_ landscape. (relating to towns or cities)
- 2 Nowadays there are new technologies and \_\_\_\_\_ instruments (complicated and advanced in design) to provide empirical evidence of these effects.
- 3 Don't \_\_\_\_\_ a very low ceiling as this could cause stress. (choose a particular thing)
- 4 At school were you ever \_\_\_\_\_ (criticised for doing something wrong) for staring out of the window and not \_\_\_\_\_ ? (listening to, watching, or considering something or someone very carefully)
- 5 Some scientists have \_\_\_\_\_ (claimed as a result of research) that this might be because people have a natural tendency to respond positively to nature.

5 The table below contains verbs and nouns from the text. Complete the missing forms.

verb	noun		Verb	noun
choose			prefer	
	effect			explanation
produce				tendency
respond			grow	

6 Complete the sentences below with the most appropriate verb or noun from exercise 5.

- 1 Until recently people didn't believe in the \_\_\_\_\_ of new brain cells in adults.
- 2 Many people have a \_\_\_\_\_ for a view of green spaces.
- 3 The height of the ceiling can \_\_\_\_\_ how we feel.
- 4 Many people have no \_\_\_\_\_ about where to live. They have to live in their family home.
- 5 Many people \_\_\_\_\_ positively to views of nature.
- 6 Yellow can \_\_\_\_\_ a feeling of happiness.
- 7 Red \_\_\_\_\_ to make people restless.
- 8 It's difficult to \_\_\_\_\_ why you like a particular colour.

7 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What did you find interesting or surprising about how architecture affects people's moods?
- Can you think of any personal examples of how a room or building affects / affected your mood?
- Can you think of any situations where a low or high ceiling might be a good idea?
- Which colours would you choose for which rooms in a house / apartment? Why?
- Would you be interested in designing rooms or furniture? Why / Why not?

## Glossary

**academic** (*adj*) – relating to education, especially education in colleges and universities

**carefree** (*adj*) – happy and without any worries, problems, or responsibilities

**cell** (*noun*) – the smallest part of a living structure that can operate as an independent unit

**detailed** (*adj*) – including many small facts or aspects

**distract** (*verb*) – to get someone's attention and prevent them from concentrating on something

**empirical** (*adj*) – based on real experience or scientific experiments rather than on theory

**enthusiasm** (*noun*) – the feeling of being very interested in something or excited by it

**landscape** (*noun*) – an area of land that has a particular type of appearance

**restless** (*adj*) – not willing or able to keep still