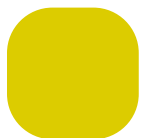
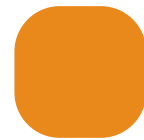


Here Comes the Sun

What a Difference Daylight Makes

In both its natural and its man made forms, light serves as a metaphor for everything from the onset of a sudden brilliant idea to the start of happier times. We all know that sunlight is crucial for our physical survival. But what is not so well understood is the role light plays in influencing our emotions and sense of well-being.

Although experts agree that attraction to light of any kind transcends culture or place (Hindu lore tells of the power of the sun god Surya, for example, while the Chinese acknowledge fire as one of the sacred elements), until recently, little research was done to examine its impact on our lives. In the past few decades, however, researchers have begun exploring the impact of



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both daylight and electric light on the built environment, the bottom line and on our own physiology. The Energy Efficient Lighting Association, for example, has found that lighting accounts for 20-25 percent of our nation's energy consumption, with commercial and industrial buildings responsible for 50 percent of that bill.

Other research tell us much about how light affects our ability to function. Studies on Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) suggest the condition is associated with a disruption in circadian rhythms due to lack of light. Interestingly, suicide and depression rates in cloudy climates appear to be higher than in places where the sun shines regularly. However, the real impact of daylight on a person's well-being remains elusive.

Products of our environment

Before Thomas Alva Edison's invention of the light bulb in the late 1800s, our dependence on natural light was reflected in the built environment. Humble dwellings in the Irish countryside were sited to maximize the position of the sun. The sundials and structures of Jantar Mantar in Jaipur, India, were constructed to determine the time and day of year. Grand Central Station in New York City was designed with clerestories that let

daylight stream into its cavernous main hall. Even after electric light became commonplace, modern structures, such as Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, were designed to make the most of natural light. Yet the light bulb allowed us to work in settings

natural conditions. Light's impact goes well beyond vision. It affects our regulatory functions, such as the production of serotonin and melatonin, which influence our waking and sleeping cycles. It also has an impact on our growth hormones.

Modulating a good thing

Few would argue that introducing natural light into the office setting is anything but good. In fact, recent trends in space planning have attempted to provide more democratic access to this precious commodity by situating circulation spaces around perimeters or enclosing perimeter offices with glass panels that let light flow into the deeper recesses of a space.

Oklahoma-based architect Rand Elliott contends that modulating daylight is the key to its success. The problem with wide-open glass spaces is that they have no mystery, he says. A space should be like a story that unfolds, and by manipulating light, you create nuance. Blinds across a window can create a trellis of light that transforms the space and produces a magical experience. By controlling light in this way, Elliott explains, it becomes an artistic medium like paint is to a painter.

To understand the emotional effects of light, New York-based interior

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designer Clodagh notes that it is important to appreciate its relationship to shadows. Places where there are no shadows, such as hospitals, are like horror shows, she says. However, rooms with layered light, where a ray of sunshine teasingly catches a flower or flows through slats in the afternoon, are pleasing.

Staying in control

A room may be illuminated with daylight or electric lights, but the composition will determine whether it serves its intended purpose. Just as background music can influence mood, light with its patterns of brightness can influence our perception of a space, says lighting designer Gary Gordon. When concentration is required lighting schemes with low levels of contrast are suitable, while dining areas and corridors can benefit from high-contrast lighting, he says.

Experts agree that the best illumination strategies include a mix of natural and artificial light. Control devices that limit light transmission can help to create a comfortable day lit environment, just as the louvers and lenses of aluminaire do with electric light. New developments in building design afford greater access to light for all occupants. Some solutions even

have dimming mechanisms that simulate the quality of the sun as it moves through the sky over the course of the day. Offices need to be places where people want to be. Integrating natural light, or devices that mimic it affords this opportunity while appealing to one of our most basic instincts: a love of the sun.

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