

DINING ROOM
BY ALBION
NORD AT 80
HOLLAND PARK



TREND

IT'S A JUNGLE IN HERE

Green walls, indoor plants and natural materials are all part of the plan for the biophilic home, says *Mary Holland*

Even before the term “biophilia” was popularised by Edward O Wilson, a Harvard biologist and conservationist who published a book of the same name in 1984, architects and designers had been using their skills to create harmony between nature and humans. Frank Lloyd Wright is a notable example, having used wood and stone to create striking architectural silhouettes deeply connected to the surrounding landscape.

While rapid urbanisation has left many of us feeling out of touch with nature, the tide is starting to turn. Stirred by political, climatic, social and pandemic strains, we are seeking spaces of refuge now more than ever before. And symbiotically, those who are designing our environments are re-evaluating old traditions to explore new approaches to harness nature’s power. One such practice is Span Architecture,

established in New York in 1995 by Karen Stonely and Peter Pelsinski. “We’re about connecting people with nature through architecture and landscape, and this operates on a bunch of levels,” says Pelsinski. “There’s representational stuff, in that something will look like nature, but there’s the literal aspect: how do we use nature in a productive way to create spaces and reconnect people with it? That’s something we’re really interested in.”

August Moon is a rural waterfront property in New England’s Maine that, although contemporary in form, blends unobtrusively into the wooded landscape as it is clad in rich dark timber both inside and out. Over the past 15 years, the studio has also revived some of the property’s original buildings that once belonged to the former owner, the American socialite Brooke Astor. These include the glass-encased teahouse: an oasis surrounded by trees where prevailing breezes from the nearby water create natural ventilation to keep it cool. It’s not only beautiful, it’s biophilic design at its most functional.

Allowing nature to dictate the design of a space in a rural environment certainly feels more doable than in urban environments but WOHA, a Singapore-based architecture firm, has been researching and innovating new architectural solutions in this sphere for years. “Having populated the cities, there’s a sense that

we’re not living in harmony with nature any more,” says co-founder Richard Hassell, who believes practising in Singapore has put them ahead of the game. The city-state began countering population density by fusing it with nature back in the 1960s, increasing the percentage of the island given over to green areas from 36 per cent to 47 per cent between 1986 and 2007. It is now dubbed “a city in a garden” and is home to the jaw-dropping Jewel Changi Airport featuring the world’s tallest indoor waterfall, the 40m HSBC Rain Vortex, as well as the giant, triffid-like Supertrees of its central Gardens by the Bay.

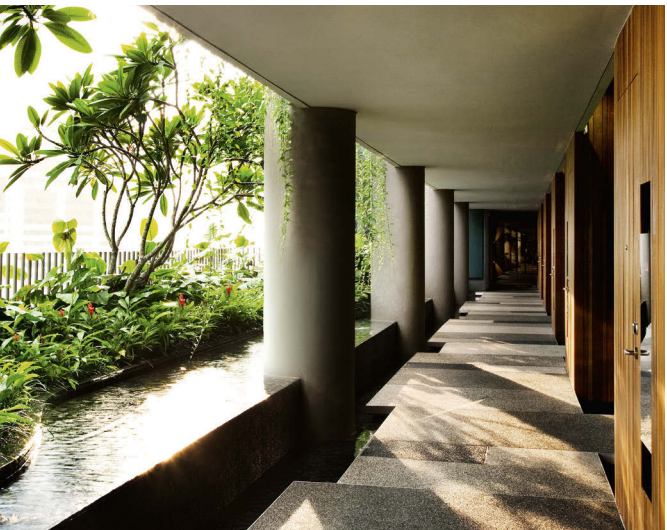
“IF I’M A BIRD, WHAT DO I NEED TO INHABIT THIS AREA?”

WOHA takes a holistic approach to green living. “We aren’t just interested in greenery from a human aspect – it’s not just a roof garden here or a green wall here. If I’m a bird, what do I need to inhabit this area? If I’m a squirrel, can I get up to this sky garden?” he says. The company has developed a rating system that monitors the performance of greenery on various levels, from the green plot ratio (measuring the amount of landscaped surfaces offered by a development) to the ecosystem contribution index (how they contribute to subsistence, wellbeing and livelihoods of all inhabitants), which encourages green buildings to attract animal life. “This approach is very much behind biophilia – it’s basically a love of diversity.”

Biophilic design does not only positively impact our environment, especially in



Top: a study at 80 Holland Park by Albion Nord and, above, a reception room, both designed for an “indoor-outdoor” experience



ILLUSTRATIONS: WILLIAM LUZ. PHOTOGRAPHS: PATRICK BINGHAM-HALL (2); PATRICK WILLIAMSON (3)

Below and bottom: the Park Royal Pickering hotel, Singapore, designed by WOHA to be “a hotel in a garden”