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# MATERIALITY

*WHY IS MATERIAL IMPORTANT TO  
OUR WELL BEING?*

## WHY ARE MATERIALS IMPORTANT?

Materiality shapes our experiences in the deepest way. It taps into our **senses**, creating an experience that draws from our **memories** and in-turn, our **emotions**. Materiality, in fact, impacts our perception of a place more than form does.

Associations between objects and their material **properties** can be formed through **past experiences**. In addition to the perception of what an object **looks like**, a person may associate how it **behaves**; the way glass shatters, the way metal exudes the surrounding temperature, and wood echoes with knocking.



### PAST EXPERIENCE INFORMS PERCEPTION

Without physical interaction, individuals perceive what a surface feels like based on prior experience. Metal looks cold while wood feels warm because we remember how it feels. Wood also maintains a more constant temperature and reflects a natural environment. It is important to consider how materials used will be interpreted by occupants.

"In some cases, there may be several layers of information in materials that enhance the connection, such as learned knowledge about the material, familiar textures, or nested fractals that occur within a stone or wood grain pattern."

- William Browning, Honorary AIA; Catherine Ryan, Joseph Clancy, Terrapin Bright Green<sup>1</sup>

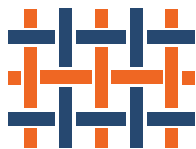


### COMFORT AND DIGNITY

Softer materials evoke a sense of comfort and will provide stress relief. Making users of spaces such as schools and offices more comfortable, will enhance their ability to work and learn.

"Consider introducing softer and natural materials, including couches, area rugs, and products with natural finishes evoke normalcy, comfort, and dignity. In a stressful time, these qualities are increasingly crucial to everyone's mental health."

- MASS Design Group, *Carceral Environments and COVID-19*<sup>2</sup>



### ILLUMINATE THE PROCESS

Humans are attracted to materials which make their manufacturing process clear. Being able to understand how a surface is made brings a level of engagement and stimulation; individuals imagine the process of making for the material they see.

"When a building's surfaces advertise the traces of their construction, they elicit our palpable, intersensory engagement in another way as well: by offering us opportunities to mentally simulate the process of their making."

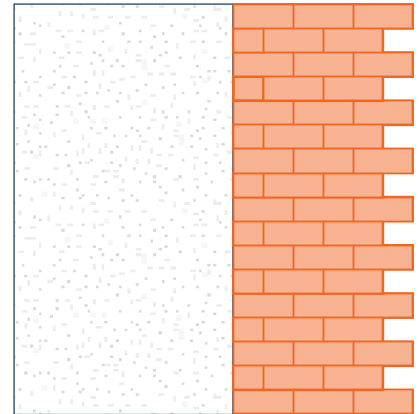
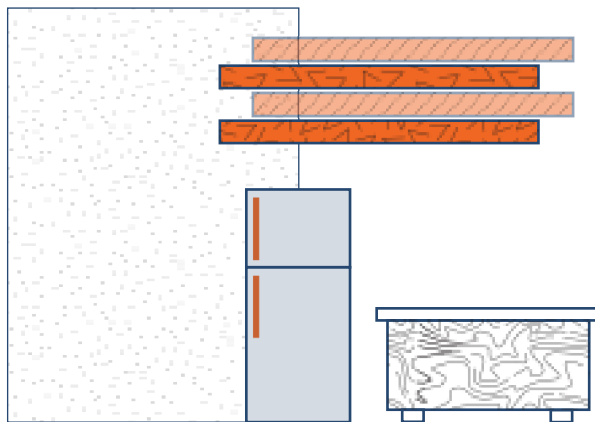
- Sarah Goldhagen, *Welcome to Your World*<sup>3</sup>

- Integrate furniture and surfaces with a soft look and feel. The space will feel inviting and users of all ages will feel comfortable using it.



Reveal the construction or making of a building or material.

- Mix in exposed brick - even in small amounts,
- Surfaces such as butcher block table tops, expresses a part-to-whole relationship.



Use materials which will be perceived to match a particular atmosphere:

- **Wood** for a **warm** and **natural** feel,
- **Metal** for a **cool** and **sleek** environment,
- **Concrete** for an **industrial** atmosphere.

“Form has wrongly been crowned king, because form-based cues elicit less of a whole-body, inter-sensory, and emotional response than surface-based cues do ...”

- Sarah Goldhagen, *Welcome to Your World*<sup>3</sup>

1 “14 Patterns of Biophilic Design.” Terrapin Bright Green, 12 Sept. 2014, [www.terrapinbrightgreen.com/reports/14-patterns](http://www.terrapinbrightgreen.com/reports/14-patterns).

2 Murphy, Michael. “The Role of Architecture in Fighting a Pandemic.” *The Boston Globe*, April 2020, [https://massdesigngroup.org/sites/default/files/multiple-file/2020-04/The%20role%20of%20architecture%20in%20fighting%20a%20pandemic\\_MMurphy\\_The%20Boston%20Globe%2004062020\\_0.pdf](https://massdesigngroup.org/sites/default/files/multiple-file/2020-04/The%20role%20of%20architecture%20in%20fighting%20a%20pandemic_MMurphy_The%20Boston%20Globe%2004062020_0.pdf).

3 Goldhagen, Sarah Williams. *Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives*. Reprint, Harper Paperbacks, 2020.