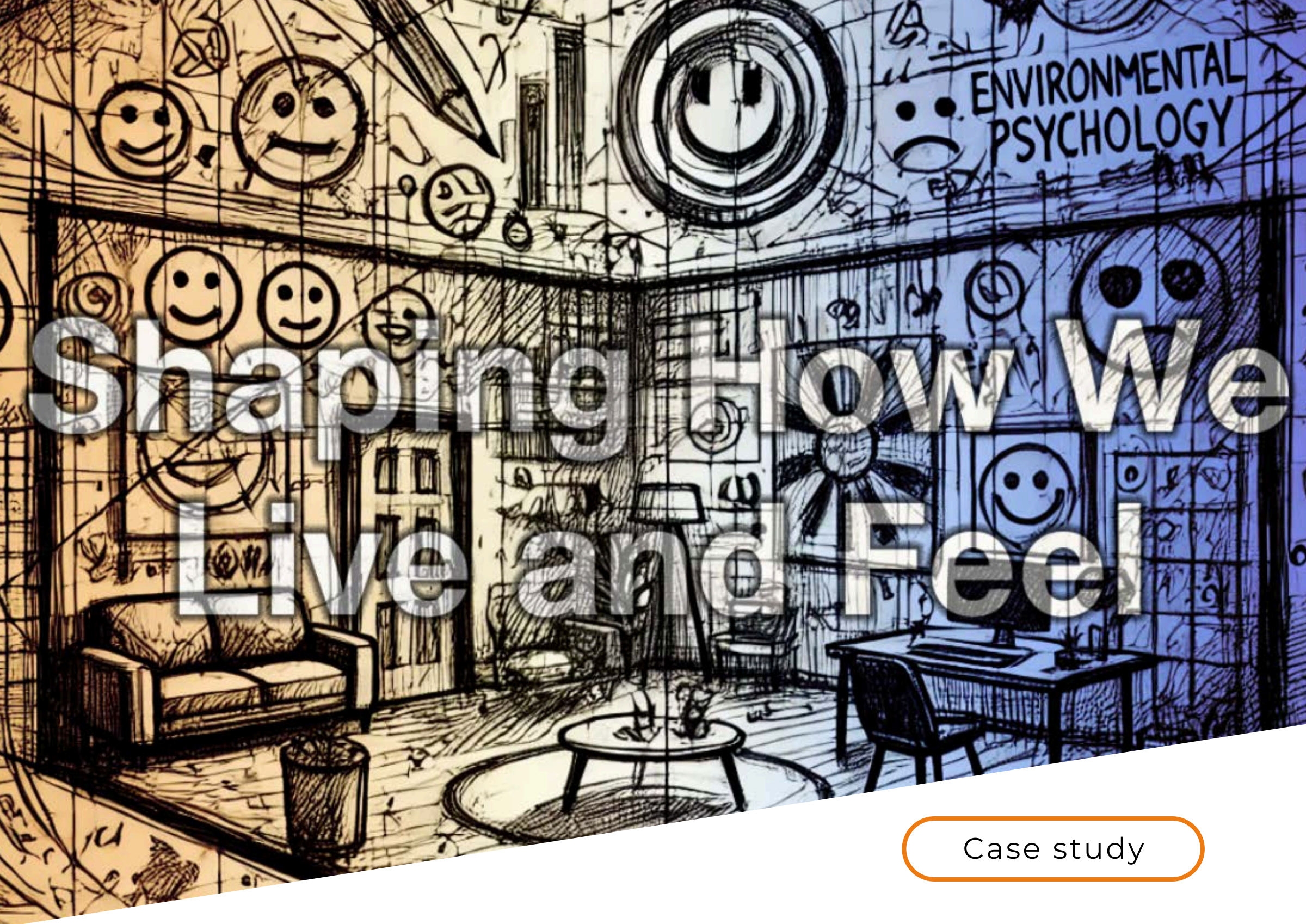


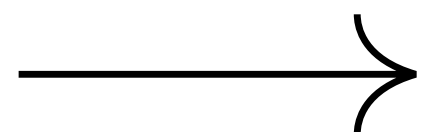


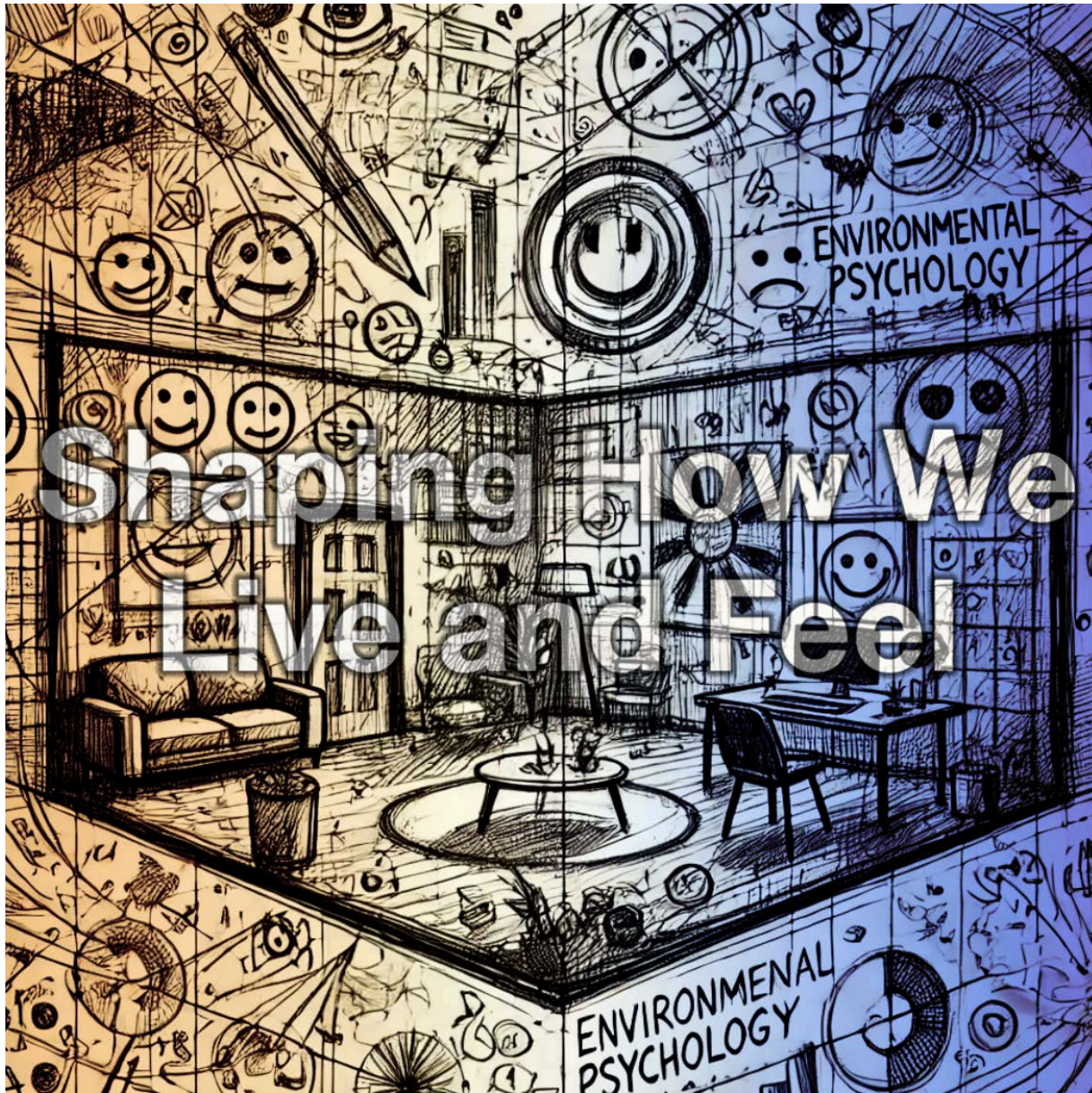
Case study



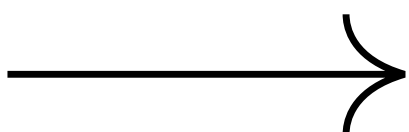
SHAPING HOW WE LIVE AND FEEL

By Huw Jones





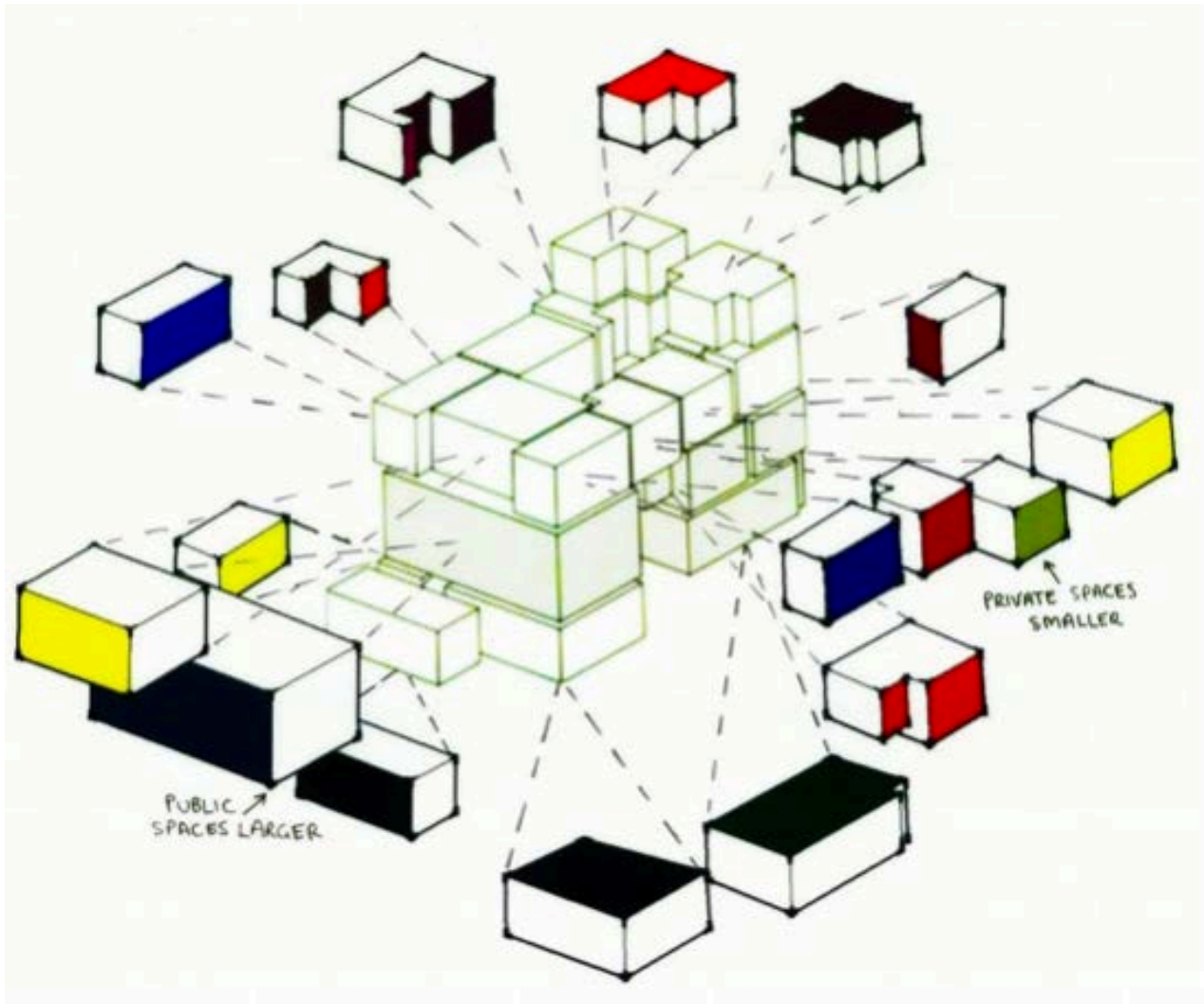
Have you ever wondered why certain spaces make you feel relaxed or energised, while others might leave you feeling confined or uneasy? It's not just a matter of personal preference, it's the influence of environmental psychology. This field studies the relationship between people and the built environment, and how design decisions affect our emotions, behaviours, intentions, and overall well-being.





In architectural design, elements like (but not limited to) ceiling height, room dimensions, glazing ratios, visual hierarchy, symmetry, contrast, repetition, colours, and material textures all play a critical role in shaping how we experience a space. A room with high ceilings, for example, can make you feel a sense of openness and freedom, whereas a room with lower ceilings may foster a sense of intimacy or, in some cases, even discomfort. Similarly, access to natural light and views of nature has been shown to reduce stress and improve mood, illustrating the direct link between design choices and psychology. Studies even suggest those with views of nature from their homes live longer and suffer fewer mental health problems.

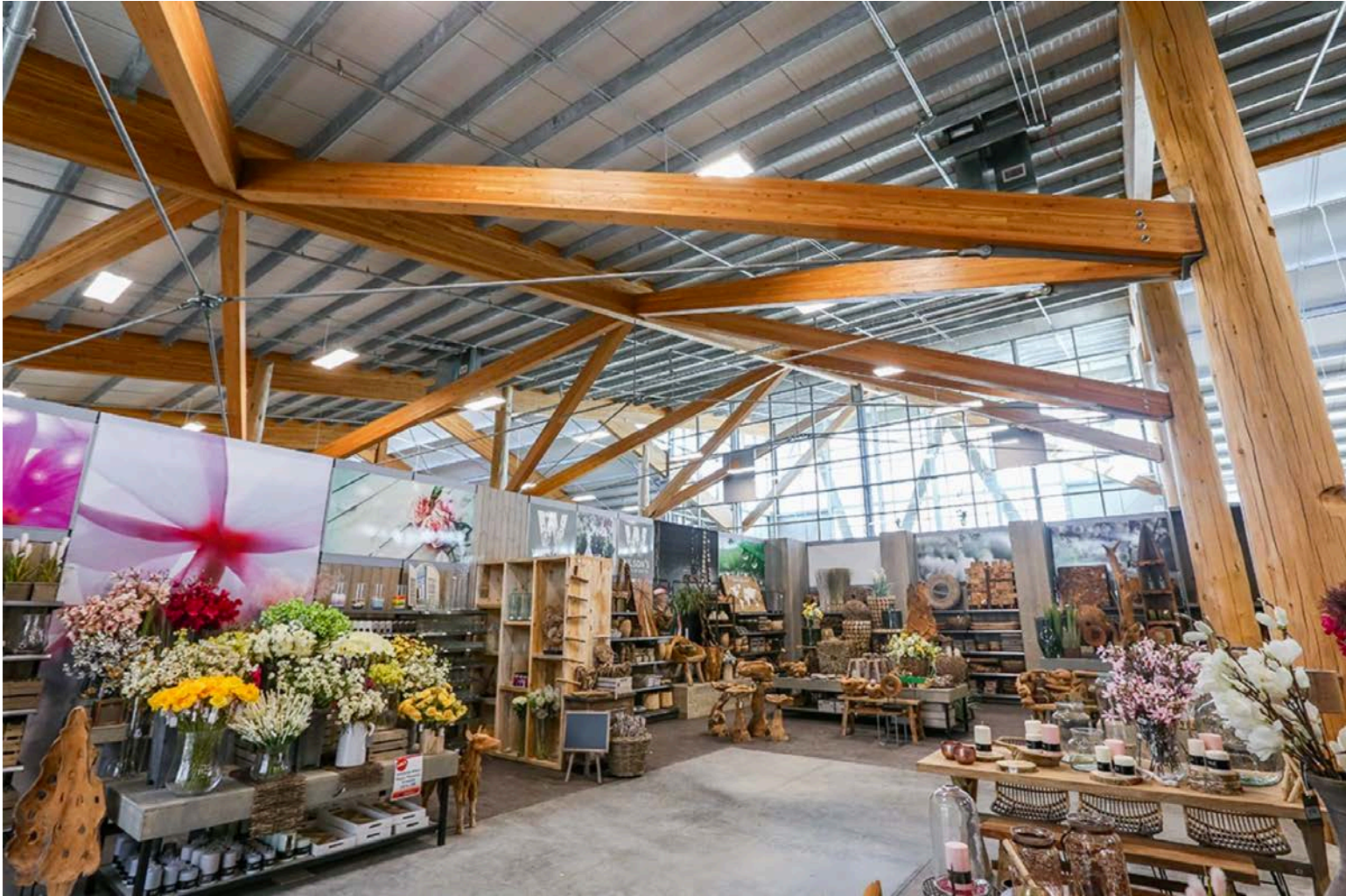




Raumplan illustration

Architects use these principles, sometimes intuitively, to influence how we interact with and perceive our surroundings. For example, public spaces are often designed to be open and inviting, encouraging social interaction and discouraging antisocial behaviour, while private spaces like bedrooms are likely to be designed for comfort and relaxation. Adolf Loos, one of the fathers of modern architecture, stated in his Raumplan that the order in which rooms are arranged and linked is every bit as important as the designs of the rooms themselves. In architecture, very few design choices are arbitrary; they are based, among other considerations, on an understanding of how our environments shape our psychological responses and behaviours.





A stronger understanding of environmental psychology can lead to the creation of more effective, human-centered spaces—spaces that not only function well but also improve the quality of life for those who use them. It's not just about visual aesthetics; it's about designing environments that support emotional well-being, productivity, and comfort. For instance, studies have shown that incorporating natural views, nature-inspired (or 'biophilic') design elements, and well-considered lighting can significantly reduce stress and enhance cognitive function in a variety of settings. In commercial life too, other design choices have been shown to influence shoppers to spend more or increase dwell time, and there's the famous trick that certain global fast food chains have employed for decades - playing faster music during busy periods encourages customers to move faster, order faster, and eat faster.





IMAGE BY PETER ZAYTSEV

Colour is another critical factor influenced by environmental psychology. Warm tones like reds and oranges tend to evoke feelings of warmth and energy, while cooler tones like blues and greens are associated with calm and tranquility. By understanding these effects, architects and interior designers can make more informed choices that cater to the emotional needs of, or otherwise influence, the occupants. For example, studies show productivity in workspaces can be improved through small & simple changes, like optimising lighting levels or choosing the right colour combinations on the walls.





By integrating these insights, architects and interior designers can design spaces that resonate on a deeper, psychological level - ultimately leading to environments that are not only beautiful but also help achieve a client's commercial goals and enhance well-being in everyday life.

References:

DOI: 10.1016/j.envint.2015.01.012

DOI: 10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.12.005

DOI: 10.1177/0956797612464659

DOI: 10.1080/10937404.2013.856361

ISBN: 978-0500203958

IEEP: Nature For Health & Equality

