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Architectural Planning for Interior Atriums and Courtyards: Maximizing Attention Restoration



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Interior atriums and courtyards have the potential to become powerful spaces for attention restoration, providing a respite from the demands of daily life and promoting mental rejuvenation. Architecturally planning these areas with attention restoration in mind involves careful consideration of elements that facilitate relaxation, engagement with nature, and cognitive renewal. In this post, we will explore key strategies to maximize attention restoration when planning interior atriums and courtyards.

Embrace Biophilic Design Principles:

Biophilic design is key to creating spaces that promote attention restoration. Incorporate natural elements, such as plants, water features, natural materials, and textures, to bring the essence of nature into the atrium or courtyard. Research suggests that exposure to nature-like environments enhances attention restoration and cognitive function (Berman et al., 2008). Integrate greenery throughout the space, fostering a sense of calm and connection with the natural world.

Integrate Prospect Views:

Prospect views, which offer an expansive and open vista, are instrumental in attention restoration. Plan for unobstructed views that allow occupants to visually engage with the surroundings. Consider using large windows, glass walls, or skylights to invite natural light and provide a connection to the outside environment. Prospect views stimulate involuntary attention and promote a sense of spaciousness and curiosity (Kaplan, 1995).

Create Refuge Spaces:

In addition to prospect views, incorporating refuge spaces within the atrium or courtyard is crucial for attention restoration. Design areas that provide a sense of privacy, enclosure, and protection. These spaces should allow individuals to retreat and feel safe from external distractions. Utilize architectural features, such as alcoves, seating areas, or plant arrangements, to create intimate and secluded spaces where individuals can unwind and recharge.

Optimize Natural Light and Lighting Design:

Lighting plays a significant role in attention restoration. Maximize natural light within the atrium or courtyard by strategically positioning windows, skylights, or light wells to capture sunlight. Natural light has been shown to enhance mood, alertness, and cognitive performance (Figueiro et al.,

2011). Complement natural light with appropriate artificial lighting, using warm and dimmable sources to create a soothing atmosphere during evening hours.

Consider Acoustic Design:

Attention restoration is closely tied to a peaceful auditory environment. Architectural planning should account for acoustic design principles to minimize noise and create a calm atmosphere. Incorporate materials and finishes that absorb sound, such as acoustic panels or textured surfaces. Strategic placement of water features or gentle background music can also contribute to a soothing soundscape that aids in attention restoration.

Incorporate Water Features:

Water features can play a significant role in attention restoration. The sight and sound of flowing water have a calming effect, promoting relaxation and reducing stress levels (Ulrich et al., 1991). Incorporate fountains, water walls, or small ponds within the atrium or courtyard design. Position them strategically to ensure they are visible and audible from different vantage points, enhancing the sensory experience and fostering a tranquil environment.

Foster Engagement with Nature:

To maximize attention restoration, create opportunities for individuals to engage with nature within the atrium or courtyard. Incorporate elements such as walking paths, seating areas, or raised platforms that invite occupants to interact with the natural environment. Consider using natural materials, such as stone or wood, to establish a sensory connection with the surrounding elements.

Pay Attention to Air Quality and Ventilation:

Clean air and proper ventilation are essential for attention restoration. Integrate air purification systems, if necessary, to maintain high indoor air quality. Utilize natural ventilation strategies, such as operable windows or venting

mechanisms, to promote fresh air circulation. Ensuring a comfortable and fresh environment enhances the overall experience and supports cognitive renewal.

Consider Flexibility and Multi-functionality:

Architectural planning should account for the flexibility and multi-functionality of the atrium or courtyard space. Design it to accommodate various activities and adapt to different needs. Incorporate movable furniture, partitions, or modular elements that can transform the space as required, allowing for individual preferences and activities that facilitate attention restoration.

Seek Professional Guidance:

Architectural planning for attention restoration requires expertise and a deep understanding of design principles. Collaborate with architects, interior designers, or consultants specializing in biophilic design and attention restoration. Their knowledge and experience will help optimize the space to create an environment that supports mental rejuvenation and attention restoration.

In conclusion, architecturally planning interior atriums and courtyards for maximum attention restoration involves integrating biophilic design principles, optimizing natural light, creating refuge spaces, and fostering engagement with nature. Consideration of acoustic design, air quality, and flexibility further enhances the potential for attention restoration. By implementing these strategies, the atrium or courtyard becomes a haven of tranquility, promoting cognitive renewal, reducing stress, and contributing to overall well-being.

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