Visual Reflection Essay on Restorative Environments

By Betsy Sen

I have always thought that nature has positive effects on human beings. The question is whether or not this positive effect provokes the person to make any change. The chapter Restorative Environments by Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan (1998) breaks down the most preferred restorative environments into five categories. They include quiet fascination, restorative environments in small spaces, being separate from distraction, seeing, sound, and old items, and the view from the window, R&R can happen anywhere in nature, even by looking out of a window or while engaging in activities that take place in a natural environment. Sometimes it is a small pocket park that takes the person away from the urban environment (traffic noise, cars, tall buildings, etc.). My experience of starting seeds indoors would be a good example. As a student I am spending most of my time indoors and it makes me feel quite sometimes. Also, as an international student I do not have lots of friends; and since we are a small group in the graduate landscape architecture program with very few students, we don’t have much free time to spend outdoors. The view from my window’s is a Magnolia tree which is great one but not something unexpected or changing throughout the year. The shape and foliage are always the same and the orientation of the window is not very fascinating either. Thus, the window from earth, which means the room never gets full sun. Another reason why I think it doesn’t help me to recover is that here at Clemson there are so many beautiful flowers. This Magnolia view from my small window does not seem significant. Finally, on the 5th of February I decided to start some tomato seedlings. Since they have grown quickly and now I have 23 inch high tomato plants that have changed my environment. My little indoor space has changed and already I see its impacts. Watching them grow and change makes me feel like I am changing too. After my tomatoes are in from my home and planted in the ground I will give myself more time to spend outside in different natural settings to relieve the great stress of graduate school.

Betsy Sen is a graduate landscape architecture student in Dr. Vincent’s Landscape Health class. Each week students submit a visual reflective essay that relates to the topic being discussed.

By Ellis Taylor

Every one of our class readings is right, nature makes you feel good. Through observing these readings I have proven that allowing the tiniest bit of nature into a room can have a massive, positive effect on attitudes and health and I believe that I have experienced this firsthand. During the summer of 2010, I participated in a 3 month long Clemson Architecture Studio that took place in New York City. While the city was amazing, the shock of going from a home that sits on 40 acres of forest to an apartment in the concrete jungle of Tribeca was almost more then I could handle. Sure I was having fun, exploring the city, and participating in shenanigans with friends, but something always felt off. I was not depressed but I became stressed-out easily and found myself missing random things, like a certain pair of shoes, during my first few weeks there. There was this small piece inside of me that didn’t feel right and I did not understand what it was until the first day I visited Central Park. I remember it like it was yesterday. Five steps into the park and all of my worries vanished. Everything that had been weighing me down that I couldn’t identify before was gone. I had missed the trees, the grass, the quiet, and the space to frolic. Maybe I am caught up in the Lorax but I do’t think I can exist without the trees. I felt like a whole new me and I understood that I needed this. I need nature, or some semblance of it, to be happy. Though I loved New York and all it had to offer, I could not have tolerated it without this green haven. After that day, I returned to Central Park every weekend without fail. It was a weekly cleansing from me; it rejuvenated me. I changed my entire experience of New York and I thank it, I thank the plants. So, for the NYC studio is one of my most treasured experiences. I have had in my time in Clemson Architecture. I learned more in 3 months there then I did in 6 months there. I wholeheartedly thank the plants for that.

Ellis Taylor is an architecture student in Dr. Vincent’s Landscape Health class. Each week students submit a visual reflective essay that connects the class material with a personal experience and includes an image that visually tells their story.

HORT 101 Reflective Essay: Rain Gardens

By Joshua Mitchell

I love water. In all seriousness, I can’t get enough it. I love it so much my body is practically made of the stuff. Okay, maybe I am a made of water. In the past few years, my life has revolves around water. Being a civil engineer, I took an internship with a company which designed storm water management systems. As well as drinking and waste water treatment plants. I learned to appreciate how important it was to recycle water every chance we get. But my knowledge about how exactly to do that was limited. That is, it was limited until I heard a lecture by Dr. Sarah White in Horticulture 101. She talked about using bio-retention areas and rain gardens to actually filter water back into the ground where it could replenish the water table and underground aquifers instead of letting water run off on a developed site. These are water-recycling tools that are both aesthetically pleasing and useful. Now, that’s awesome: the best of both worlds, I especially appreciated learning about these because my specialization within civil engineering is in water services. So, I foresee having numerous projects in my career where we are managing stormwater. Now, I’ve just gotten my feet ‘wet’ with these technologies. So, I’ll have a lot more research, but I plan on implementing some of these rain garden and bio-retenion strategies in projects in the future and hopefully saving both our eyes and our water.

Joshua Mitchell is a civil engineering major at Clemson University and a student in Dr. Vincent’s HORT 101 class. Students are required to submit a scholarly paragraph each week on the subject matter currently being discussed.

References