

As a society, we are continuously learning about the powerful impact that nature can have on our well-being—both physically and mentally. We inherently connect with nature. A peaceful walk in the woods, a relaxing swim in calm water, or a quiet moment enjoying a beautiful view can calm our minds and rejuvenate our spirits. So how can we cultivate this same sense of tranquility when spending time in our own homes? Consider incorporating the following design concepts into your home to reap the extraordinary calming benefits of Mother Nature.

TRANQUILITY through DESIGN

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Water Feature

Element of Fire

Maximize Natural Light and Fresh Air

The importance of natural light cannot be emphasized enough. Exposure to natural light helps our bodies produce Vitamin D, improves our circadian rhythms and sleep patterns, helps us focus, and even makes us happier. Maximize your home's ability to receive light and breeze by avoiding heavy, light-blocking window treatments and incorporating light and airy treatments that allow for both elements to flow through freely. Make use of natural materials such as cotton, linen, or raw silk. You may also place a mirror on a wall opposite a window to reflect light and views from the window.

Incorporate the Element of Fire

There's nothing more relaxing, soothing, and uplifting than sitting by a warm, roaring fire. Numerous research studies have found that sitting by a fire decreases blood pressure. I'm sure you've noticed that once a fire is blazing, anyone in its vicinity is immediately drawn to it. That said, if building, tending, and cleaning

up after a wood fire isn't your cup of tea, gas fireplaces, fire pits, fire tables, and fire bowls are convenient and virtually cleanup free. If your fireplace needs a facelift, consider painting the brick a fresh color, updating the mantel with a simple rustic beam, or replacing the surround with a stunning tile.

Create a Water Feature

Scientists explain that seeing or hearing the soothing sounds of moving water triggers a response in our brains that induces a flood of neurochemicals. These chemicals increase blood flow to the brain and heart, which causes relaxation. Yet, we don't need to live in a waterfront home or have a pool to surround ourselves with water! Create your own oasis by installing a small koi pond near your back patio or placing a decorative recirculating water fountain on your screen porch.

Make Use of Natural Materials

One of the reasons we enjoy nature so much is our inherent connection to the

outdoors and natural elements (wood, cotton, and seagrass, for example). Choose materials that resonate with your personal style. One may enjoy the rugged nature of stone in their living room, while another may prefer the more sophisticated flair of dark mahogany flooring in their office. Ceilings and walls can be beautifully adorned with reclaimed wood beams, and countertops can be replaced with a natural stone such as granite, marble, slate, or soapstone. Choose natural elements that incorporate your style and connect you to your interiors.

Similarity = Familiarity

Symmetrical design is calm and peaceful compared to design concepts based on surprising or asymmetrical elements. To incorporate symmetry, carefully choose a room's focal point. It should be an element that immediately draws your eye upon walking in. For example, the focal point could be the fireplace in a living room, the bed in a master bedroom, or the dining table in a dining room. Now,



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just like with a balance scale, balance the weight by placing similarly heavy objects on either side of your focal point. You can do this by arranging two sofas in a way that flank the fireplace, by placing matching table lamps on each nightstand beside the bed, or filling either side of a dining room table with chairs, a pair of tabletop plants, and a chandelier centered above. The bottom line is always to identify the room's focal point and then surround it with symmetrical decor elements.

Blend Indoor and Outdoor Living

The most special entertainment areas are where the inside meets the outside of a home. When you can expand the house's indoor living or kitchen area into the "outside room," you can embrace the views, the wind, and the smell of nature while doubling the floor area of your entertainment space. Outdoor living spaces are opportunities for introducing open fire and flowing water, creating whimsy, and introducing sounds that differ significantly from the emotions experienced inside the home. One way to incorporate this concept is by utilizing a folding glass wall system. These systems allow the doubling of an entertainment area with easy flow across the large opening's width. The glass walls can fold on themselves in a scissor-like fashion, or they can slide and stack into a wall pocket. Where bugs prevail, a large screen can be married with the folding glass panels.

Plant for Beauty and Health

Plants have the unique ability to appeal to many of our senses. Imagine the sensation of lush grass under your bare feet, the visual treat of vibrant flowers, or the sweet-smelling blooms of a rose garden. Yet, we are not the only ones that can benefit from a beautifully landscaped space. By incorporating native plants into your landscaping, you will provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals. Don't forget to integrate plants throughout your indoor spaces, as well—on top of improving air quality and increasing humidity, plants are an easy and beautiful way to bring life to your living space. Style your bookshelves with succulents, or try something big and bold like a gorgeous fiddle leaf fig. You can also play with the



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Space for relaxation



Similarity = Familiarity

pots you select, displaying your plants in lovely ceramic and copper containers.

Create an Outdoor Sanctuary

Take steps to develop an outdoor sanctuary that is so comfortable and convenient you'll want to use it year-round. Ensure you can continue enjoying your outdoor space well past sunset by incorporating exterior lighting such as landscape lighting, lanterns, or string lights. Move TV time from the couch to the outdoors by mounting a television on an exterior wall. Ensure maximum climate comfort by installing an outdoor heater and ceiling fan. To upgrade your space even further, consider adding Bluetooth speakers, an outdoor kitchen, or an outdoor fireplace.

Make Space for Relaxation

Creating a dedicated space for rest and relaxation can encourage healthy habits such as reading, meditating, or journal-

ing. This space could be a sunroom with views of nature, a spare bedroom, or even a plush armchair placed in the corner of a room. Once you've chosen a specific space, take a few steps to ensure maximum comfort. Incorporate soft lighting, add a cozy blanket, and bring in destressing elements such as potted plants and beautiful artwork. Make the space a technology-free zone and keep the area free of clutter and work-related distractions to ensure it remains a place of peace.

Go Forth

Architectural design and interior design have a significant impact on the way we emotionally react to a space. Our senses—what we see, feel, and touch—influence our thinking, feelings, and actions and, therefore, our entire body. Thus, one of the most important ways we can take care of ourselves is to surround ourselves with spaces that help us appreciate the beauty of life.

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, she is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio. An award-winning residential architecture and interior design firm specializing in exceptional homes and luxurious estates throughout the East Coast from Plymouth, MA to Warm Springs, VA, Cathy has grown her team two-fold in the past three years. Purple Cherry Architects truly loves the journey of bringing together their clients with stunning pieces of property where they can build the home of their dreams.

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