Session Spotlight: The Science and Design of Biophilic Urbanism

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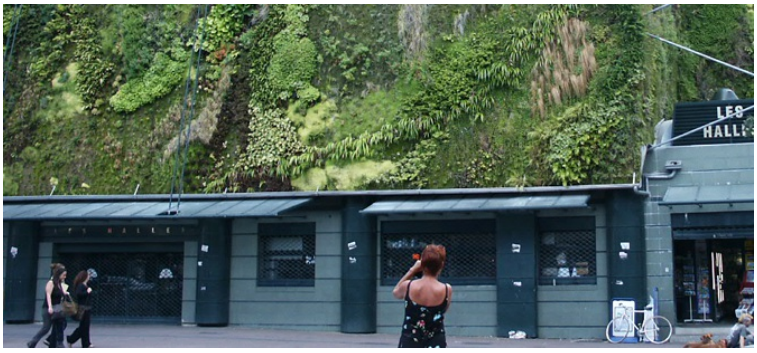

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The following session is part of USGBC's Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, an annual gathering of ~35,000 professionals, students and stakeholders in the green building movement. This year's conference will take place Nov. 14-16 in San Francisco, Calif. For more information or to register, please visit GreenbuildExpo.org.

How do we create biophilic cities? Ones that are in tune with ecological systems, foster place-based relationships, and embody the attributes of nature in their design?

Three industry pros will dive in to the science and design of biophilic urbanism at Greenbuild. Below, session speaker Judith Heerwagon, associate faculty at the University of Washington, gives a sneak peek.

What's the topical focus of your session?

JH: Nature as a public health benefit. The session will identify the scientific evidence linking the experience of nature to physical, emotional, and social well being and to the overall habitability of urban spaces. The session will address how to use the evidence to develop design strategies and practices at different levels of scale and complexity and for all residents and neighborhoods.

Why is the topic of your session important?

JH: Biophilic design has the potential to improve human life in all environments, to reduce the stresses of daily living, and to have wide public health impacts while also beautifying the environment in cost effective ways for people of all ages.

Why should Greenbuild attendees attend YOUR session specifically?

JH: Biophilia is central to creating places and spaces that are beneficial for people. We evolved in a natural landscape and there is good reason to believe that nature still has a strong hold on our neuropsychology. It is known that merely viewing preferred natural scenes stimulates the opiate centers in the brain associated with relaxed sense of pleasure.

What's the most interesting experience you've had in the green building/sustainability world?

JH: Knowing Ray Anderson - he was the most inspiring and yet down to earth person I have ever known.

What's the most interesting non-green building related fact about yourself?

JH: I once had a pet crow who fell out of a nest in Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo with eyes closed and no feathers. He learned to fly around my house, sat on my shoulder, and eventually fledged and returned to the zoo. I know this because he (she?) recognized me when I was with my daughter at the zoo one afternoon and walked along side of us. It was a magical moment.

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