Gensler Research

Health & Wellness

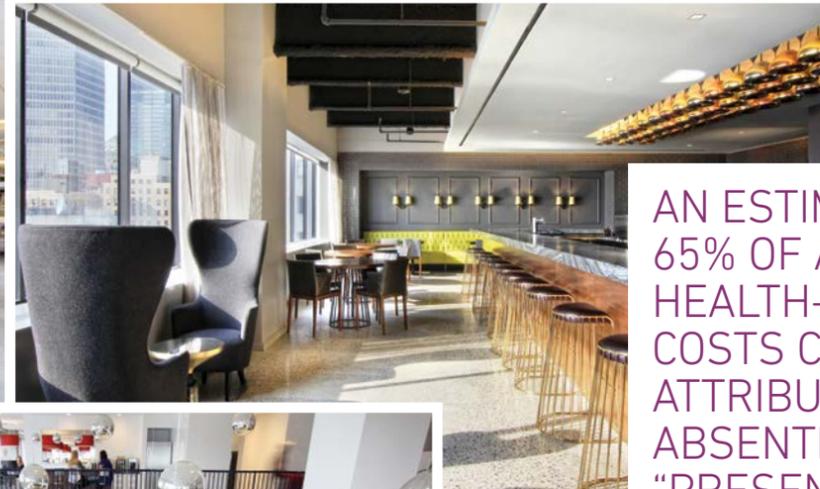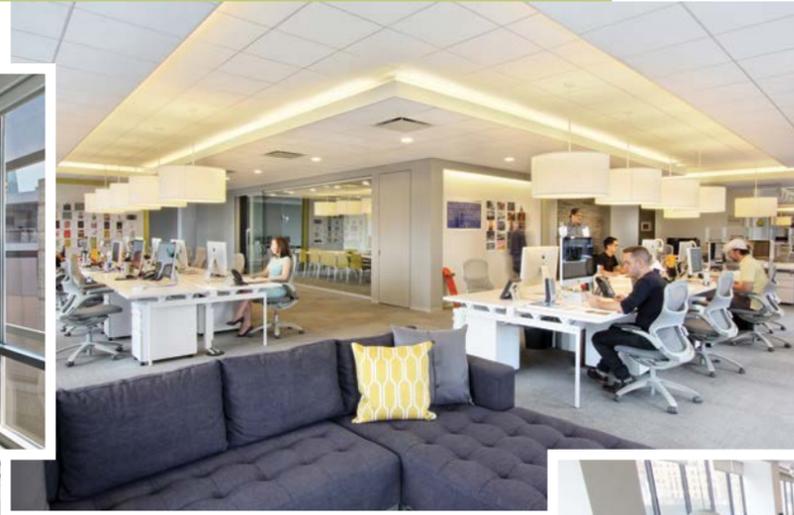**Gensler Research Catalogue, Selected Content**

Wellness brings the consumer revolution to healthcare.

As global health concerns come to the fore, new models and approaches to healthcare are being developed. Business segments such as medical tourism and healthcare retail are at the forefront of an industry increasingly focused on customer experience, choice, and a broadened approach to health that goes well beyond hospitals and doctors' offices. Addressing today's health challenges requires a focus on all the spaces and experiences that make up our daily lives, using the provision and design of space to support positive behavior and contribute to health improvements.
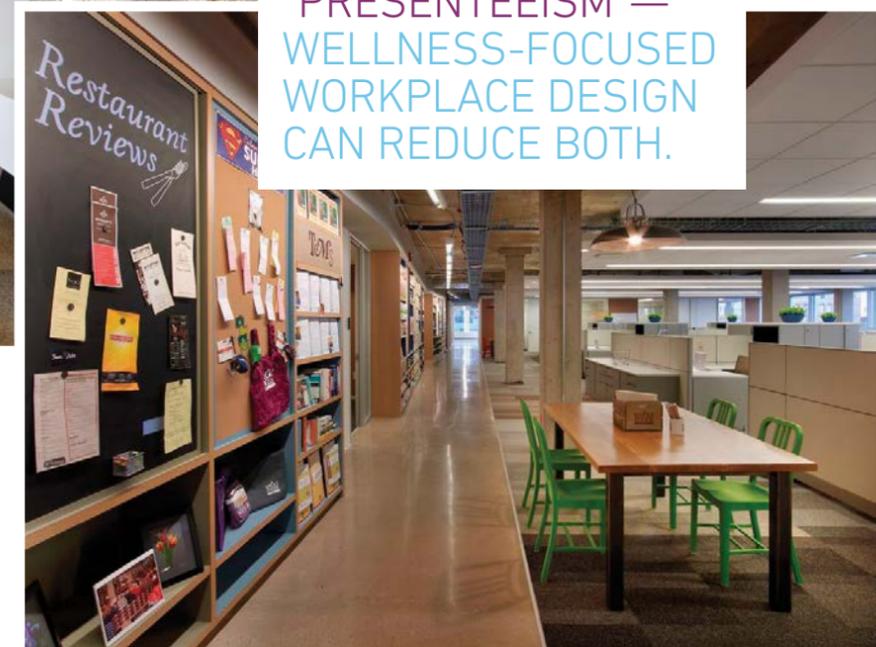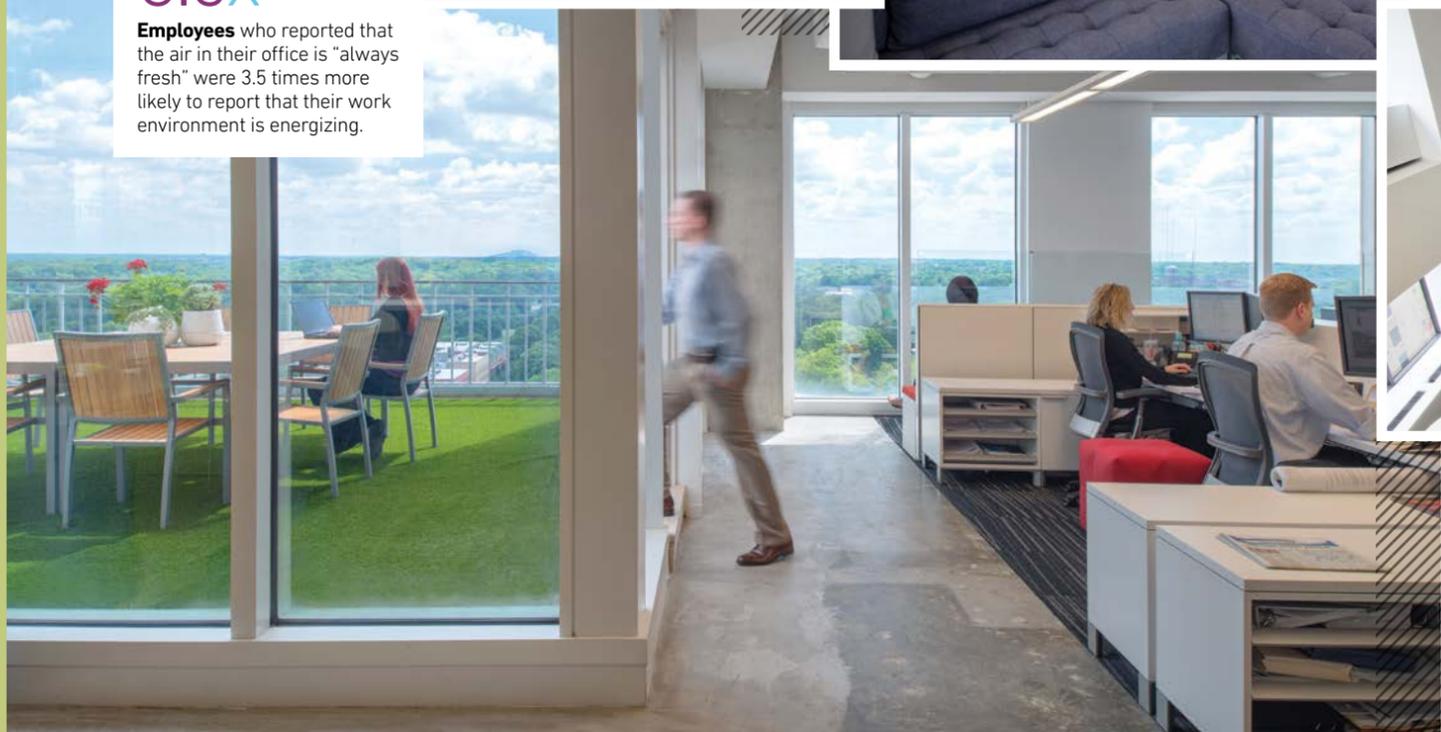
Does a healthy workplace improve the bottom line?

3.5x

Employees who reported that the air in their office is "always fresh" were 3.5 times more likely to report that their work environment is energizing.

AN ESTIMATED 65% OF A COMPANY'S HEALTH-RELATED COSTS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO ABSENTEEISM AND "PRESENTEEISM"— WELLNESS-FOCUSED WORKPLACE DESIGN CAN REDUCE BOTH.

89%

Employees who reported a company's health benefits as significant to their choice of employer.

36%

Employers who reported having the necessary information to make actionable decisions about an employee health strategy.

WHAT WE DID

We conducted an exploratory data and secondary source analysis to uncover organizational and workplace design factors that influence employee wellness. Our goal was to understand and document the importance of employee well-being to business productivity and success, and to use that knowledge to uncover opportunities for leveraging workplace design to improve well-being and, ultimately, worker performance.

We first reviewed existing research to gather data on the medical, social, regulatory, and economic implications of employee health in the workplace, as well as to document the state of workplace wellness strategies today. We conducted internal interviews and a survey of Gensler employees to understand how design professionals see themselves within larger well-being conversations. We also leveraged Gensler's significant database of Workplace Performance Index® (WPI) responses specific to health and wellness-related questions, and examined relationships between workplace design factors, employee behaviors, and well-being indicators such as absenteeism and energy levels.
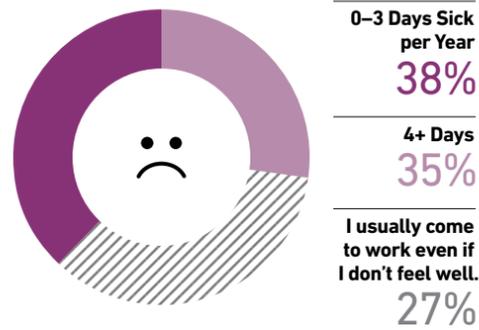
THE CONTEXT

According to a 2012 study by the *Society for Human Resources Management* (SHRM), the vast majority of companies see workplace wellness as an opportunity to reduce health insurance costs, increase productivity, and reduce absenteeism. Yet half of the companies surveyed rated their wellness initiatives as ineffective—a possible explanation for the stagnating implementation of wellness initiatives over the past five years even as knowledge of the potential benefits gains traction.

A survey conducted by Virgin HealthMiles Inc. confirms both the importance and the challenge of wellness initiatives: 89% of employees reported a company's health benefits as significant to their choice of employer, but only 36% of employers reported having the necessary information to make actionable decisions about an employee health strategy.
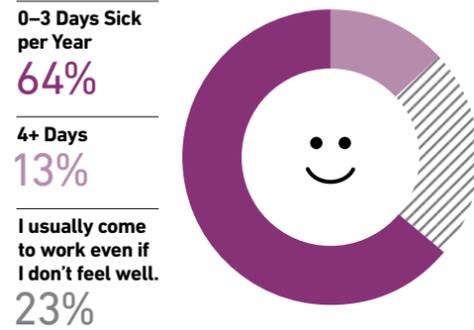
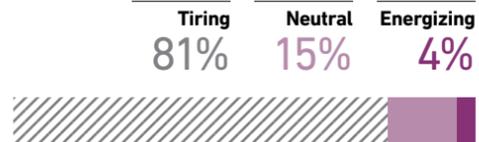# Satisfaction with Work Environment

Not at All Satisfied

0–3 Days Sick per Year	**38%**
4+ Days	**35%**
I usually come to work even if I don't feel well.	**27%**

Employees who are satisfied with their work environment → **call in sick less.**

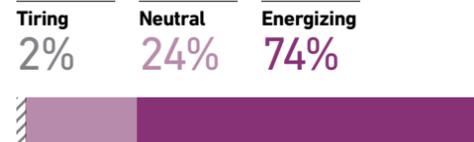And are **less likely to come to work when sick.** →

Extremely Satisfied

0–3 Days Sick per Year	**64%**
4+ Days	**13%**
I usually come to work even if I don't feel well.	**23%**

Not at All Satisfied

Tiring	Neutral	Energizing
81%	15%	4%

They are also **significantly more likely to report their workspace is energizing.** →

Extremely Satisfied

Tiring	Neutral	Energizing
2%	24%	74%

Reported Air Quality

Stuffy/Stale

0–3 Days Sick per Year	**47%**
4+ Days	**25%**
I usually come to work even if I don't feel well.	**28%**

Employees in workplaces with good air quality → **call in sick less.**

And are **less likely to come to work when sick.** →

Always Fresh

0–3 Days Sick per Year	**65%**
4+ Days	**13%**
I usually come to work even if I don't feel well.	**22%**

Stuffy/Stale

Tiring	Neutral	Energizing
39%	45%	16%

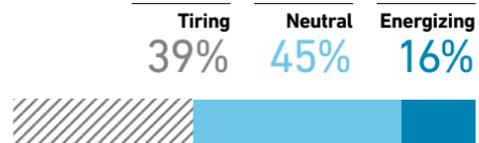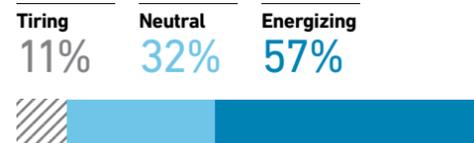They are also **significantly more likely to report their workspace is energizing.** →

Always Fresh

Tiring	Neutral	Energizing
11%	32%	57%

THE RESULTS

An estimated 7% of employer health-related costs can be attributed to absenteeism, and another 58% to "presenteeism"—the act of attending work while sick—according to SHRM data. This totals a potential 65% of health-related costs that are directly connected to the well-being of workers.

Addressing the wellness-focused aspects of the workplace is an opportunity to reduce these costs according to our analysis of 9,600+ Gensler WPI respondents who provided data related to health and wellness concerns. Employees who are dissatisfied with their workplace are more likely to call in sick: 35% of those who are dissatisfied called in sick four or more days per year versus only 13% of those who are satisfied. The result was even more dramatic when asked if they find their workplace energizing: 74% of workers satisfied with their workplace reported their space as energizing versus only 4% of those dissatisfied with their environment. Functionality, comfort, and adjustability of furniture showed particular relationships to employees' reported level of energy at work. Air quality, noise, and natural light also influenced energy levels, and showed direct relationships to the likelihood of employees calling in sick.

WHAT THIS MEANS

HIGH-QUALITY WORK ENVIRONMENTS IMPROVE EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND SATISFACTION.

Employees satisfied with the physical and performance factors of their workplace report higher energy levels when at work, and take fewer sick days than peers in underperforming environments.

HEALTHY WORKPLACES EMPOWER WORKERS TO MAKE BETTER WELLNESS CHOICES.

Employees whose physical environments are healthier and higher performing are not only less likely to call in sick, they are also less likely to come to the office when they are sick—they're working more, and staying home when they should.

EMPOWER DESIGNERS TO HAVE WELLNESS CONVERSATIONS.

Only one in five designers currently sees health and wellness as an issue they can raise with clients, and only one in three feels equipped to implement a design strategy addressing health and wellness concerns.

SHIFT CONVERSATIONS FROM MEDICAL COSTS TO HEALTHY BEHAVIORS.

Tackling wellness requires a shift in focus from treatment to prevention. Design is an opportunity to address incidental factors, instill a culture of wellness, and keep low-risk employees at low risk by providing healthy environments and promoting healthy behaviors.

PERSPECTIVES

The business consultancy McKinsey has estimated that US companies spend more than $73 billion in health-care costs, or between 2% and 7% of their annual health-care budgets, on the nation's obesity "pandemic."

WHAT'S NEXT

To better communicate how design can directly influence wellness factors, we organized our findings into 10 categories that form the basis for our continued investigations, ranging from physical factors such as air quality and acoustics to experience factors like levels of autonomy. Within each category, we continue to develop metrics and tools to measure impact more directly.
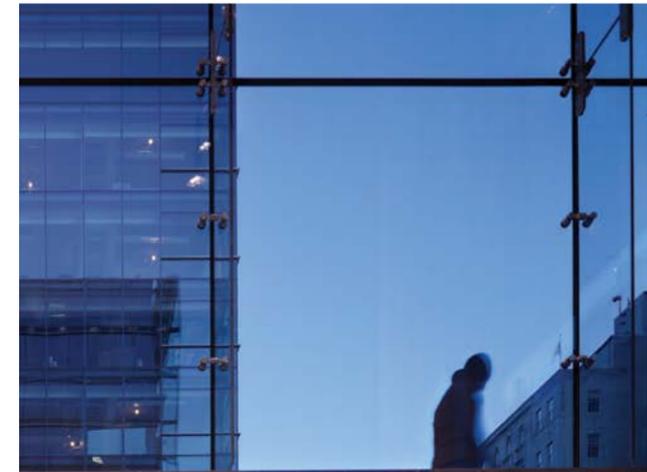
These factors, paired with our exploratory WPI analysis, also form the foundation of a new survey-based performance assessment tool targeted toward measuring the wellness and performance aspects of the workplace. This survey is currently being piloted with select clients.

LEARN MORE

Can holistic design strategies improve health and healing?

emotional

physical

spiritual

A "soul-centered" design approach that aligns the design of the physical environment with wellness strategies can enhance emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

WHAT WE DID

We gathered articles and case stories from various health and wellness journals and periodicals to develop a more detailed understanding of the characteristics and value of design to promote wellness. We then conducted interviews with thought leaders and experts in the field of health and wellness to build on this knowledge. Our goal was to take the broad topic of health and wellness and document specific information to inform the design of interior environments to promote these ideals.

"There has been a revolution in the provision of healthcare and a recognition that the physical environment matters to people's health and well-being and that the health and well-being of the whole person needs to be addressed rather than just the disease."

–Clare Cooper Marcus & Naomi Sachs, *Therapeutic Landscapes* (2013)

THE CONTEXT

The health challenges of modern society necessitate a health renaissance, a return to a holistic approach to health and wellness that goes well beyond Western medical techniques. We perceive an increasing openness and need for new standards and types of care, leading to the increasing use of Western and Eastern wellness strategies in tandem to improve health and heal the whole individual—mind, body, and soul.

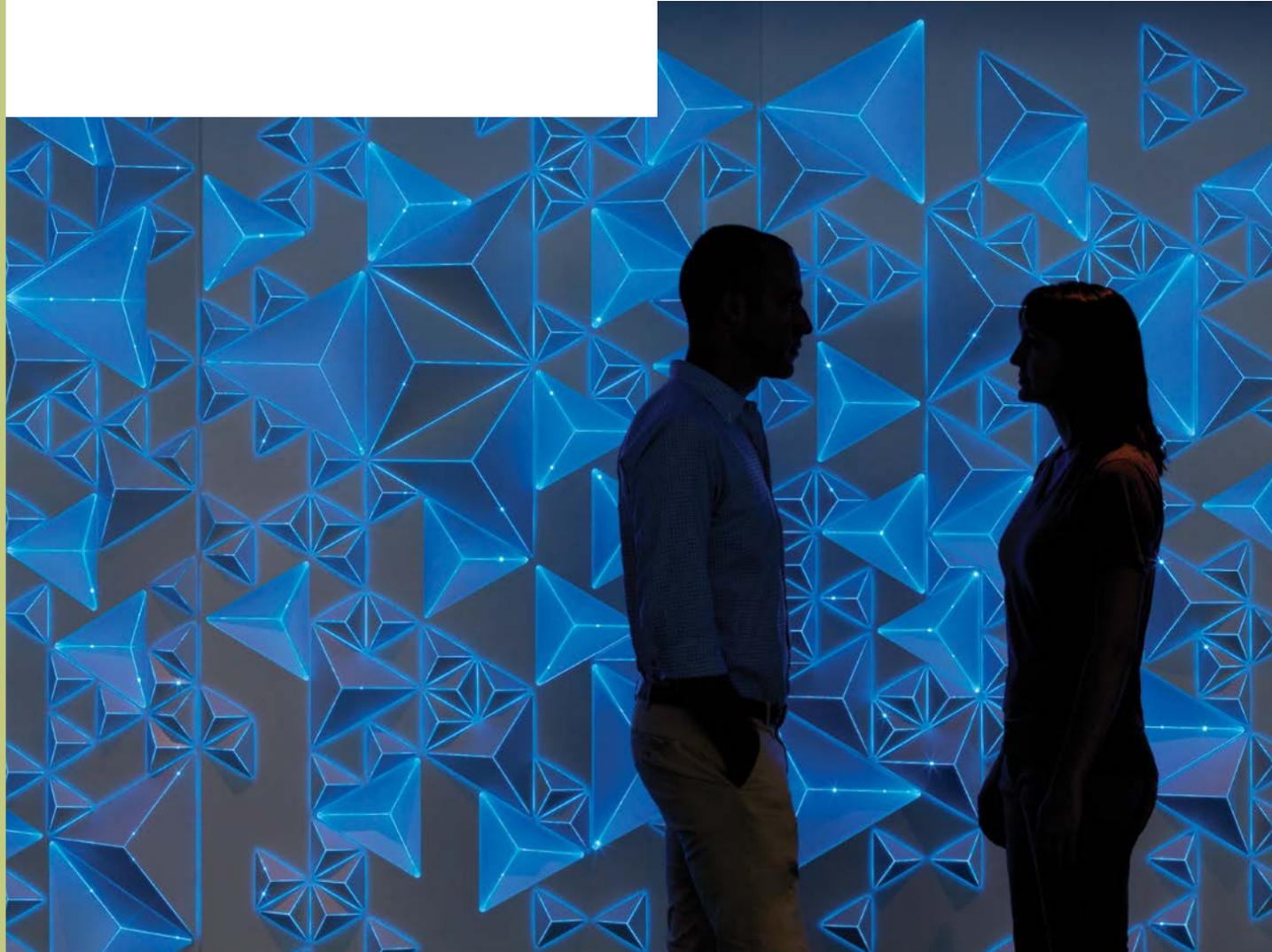A key aspect of this emerging need consists of the recent shifts in technology. While new technology often represents forward progress, it can also challenge the health of individuals and society. As the pace of change accelerates, largely due to technological advances, our wellness is compromised if we lose the ability to reflect and retreat. Obesity, cancer, mental disorders, and issues surrounding aging are among the many significant areas in which the impact is apparent. Our research seeks to promote design as a key element to address this modern-day imbalance.

THE RESULTS

The importance of an approach to wellness that is broader than a focus on treatment and physical illness is clear. **A holistic approach that addresses emotional and spiritual factors can fortify wellness at a greater scale.** The design of space is a key aspect to these strategies and an opportunity to go beyond the physical, connecting with and addressing the human experience in its entirety.

Connections to nature quickly emerged as a key theme. Views of nature from patient rooms have been shown to improve healing time and reduce the need for pain medication. The effect goes further—connections to nature also have restorative power that translates to greater attention capacity, health, and life satisfaction. The need to maintain connections to nature becomes increasingly dire as the world's population shifts toward urban living.

The needs of an aging population were also a significant focus of our interviews with leaders in health and wellness. **Familiarity, intuitive way-finding, and environmental cues are important environmental aspects,** particularly for those struggling with dementia or Alzheimer's. The ability to navigate a space easily is also a key strategy for those looking to promote greater physical activity among an increasingly sedentary, desk-based population. The potential benefits of increased activity are not only physical (addressing obesity, heart disease) but also emotional, as increased exercise is connected to greater levels of happiness and energy.
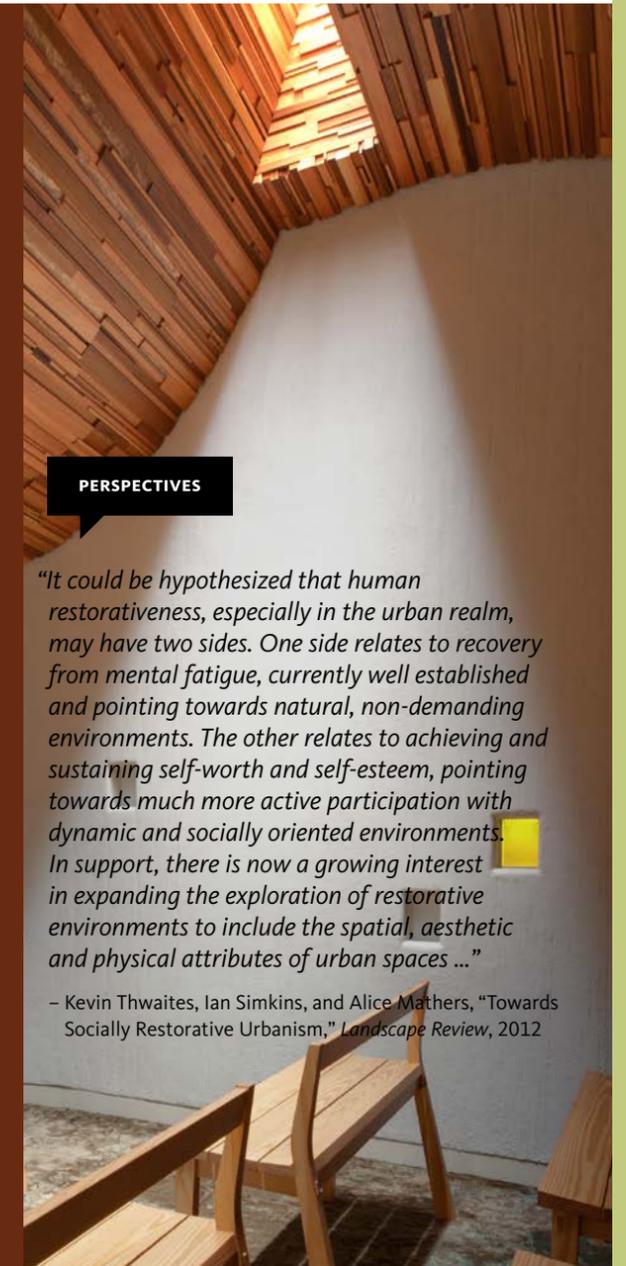
WHAT THIS MEANS

Elevate the physical experience.

The design of physical space has far-reaching effects on human well-being. Connections to nature, intuitive navigation, and spaces that support activity and engagement are key attributes of wellness-based environments.

Use design to connect emotionally.

The wellness impact of space goes beyond physical health or experience. Design also has an impact on social interaction as well as emotional experience and well-being, including the support of positive emotional states that have been linked to better health, longer life, and greater overall well-being.

Allow for spirituality and reflection.

The restorative powers of natural environments and those that allow people to reflect are significant. Restorative environments have been shown to improve concentration and self-control, with potential effects including improved work performance and better eating habits.

PERSPECTIVES

"It could be hypothesized that human restorativeness, especially in the urban realm, may have two sides. One side relates to recovery from mental fatigue, currently well established and pointing towards natural, non-demanding environments. The other relates to achieving and sustaining self-worth and self-esteem, pointing towards much more active participation with dynamic and socially oriented environments. In support, there is now a growing interest in expanding the exploration of restorative environments to include the spatial, aesthetic and physical attributes of urban spaces ..."

– Kevin Thwaites, Ian Simkins, and Alice Mathers, "Towards Socially Restorative Urbanism," *Landscape Review*, 2012

WHAT'S NEXT

We continue to interview and document the perspectives of key thought leaders to broaden our understanding. While our initial discussions focused on healing environments and addressing the needs of the aging, we found that wellness can be promoted in myriad ways and space types. In addition, we hope to create integrative medicine and holistic design tools and guidelines to continue to engage designers with these concepts.

LEARN MORE

About Gensler

As architects, designers, planners and consultants, we partner with our clients on some 3,000 projects every year. These projects can be as small as a wine label or as large as a new urban district. With more than 4,000 professionals networked across 46 locations, we serve our clients as trusted advisors, combining localized expertise with global perspective wherever new opportunities arise. Our work reflects an enduring commitment to sustainability and the belief that design is one of the most powerful strategic tools for securing lasting competitive advantage.

Locations

Abu Dhabi	Detroit	Morristown	São Paulo
Atlanta	Doha	New York	Seattle
Austin	Dubai	Newport Beach	Seoul
Baltimore	Hong Kong	Philadelphia	Shanghai
Bangalore	Houston	Phoenix	Singapore
Bangkok	La Crosse	Pittsburgh	Sydney
Beijing	Las Vegas	Raleigh-Durham	Tampa
Boston	London	San Diego	Tokyo
Charlotte	Los Angeles	San Francisco	Toronto
Chicago	Mexico City	San Jose	Washington, DC
Dallas	Miami	San José	
Denver	Minneapolis	San Ramon	

Gensler Research

Gensler established its Research Program to support research investigations important to our firm, our clients, and to the ongoing learning and development of Gensler professionals. Research projects are practitioner-led with involvement across the globe spanning our 46 offices, 27 practice areas, and 4,000+ professionals. Our teams bring thought leadership to the table as we seek to solve our clients' and the world's most pressing challenges by creating high-performance solutions that embrace the business and world context in which we work, enhance the human experience, and deliver game-changing innovation.

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