



January, 2014

Delighting in Mystery.

The sound of a bell ringing. Mist billowing from a shallow pool of water. Curved walls

leading to hidden destinations.

Follow the sound of water from a mysterious source, waiting upstairs to be discovered, finally, and touched. Cold, fresh, disappearing and re-appearing as if conducted by an invisible hand. And, my favorite: water gushing from a dragon's mouth, the impact just enough to drown the voices from inside the "den."

We are in the middle of something.

We are in fact at Longwood Garden's children's garden.

Top image: Moon Bridge, Zhangjiajie, Hunan, China, from Green Renaissance



Longwood Gardens



Longwood Gardens

Although the spaces in the garden were designed for children, the place is filled with people of all ages. Adults squeezing through tight places, ducking beneath low openings, eagerly exploring the sequence of rooms unfolding before them. The sound of water everywhere, bubbling, spouting, murmuring....mysteriously appearing and disappearing. The scent of Jasmine wafting through the air. The pungent smell of herbs. Light pouring through glass floors set with colored marbles, light-filled overlooks contrasting with dark, low, foggy places, patterns... patterns and textures begging to be touched everywhere.

And color: painted animals, birds and insects placed throughout. Small mysteries, which entice exploration and the promise of discovery. And humor and delight. The joyful seduction of intimate details beckoning us to approach and investigate.



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Mystery. Enticement. Discovery. Delight.

I ask myself: why don't we design this way for grown-ups? Why don't we design all our spaces so people can't wait to discover what's around the bend? Why don't we design each and every space to be experienced interactively in movement, in restfulness, to be engaging, joyful, playful, engaging our senses, engaging our explorer's minds?

Why do we assume that play is just for children and that mystery is something we, as adults, no longer need?

Mystery. Enticement. Discovery. Each place or space we design and inhabit, be it home, work or civic space, should contain aspects of these three curiosity-arousing qualities. We will feel alive, young at heart, creative and physiologically healthy because of it.



National park, Tasmania Image by Robert Van Koesveld.



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Neurological Benefits of Delight.

The concept of sensory emotional connection with our environment has fascinated scientists for years.

Biochemistry, cell biology and molecular biology can now piece together how sensory perception activates different areas of the brain resulting in feelings of delight, joy, curiosity, awe, peace or even fear. New technologies are beginning to

prove how the spaces through which we move affect our moods, our emotional memory, and change the brain's hormonal balance.

Based on new research we can say with certainty that incorporating the elements of enticement, mystery, discovery and ultimately joy, into our built environment can lead us to a state of greater physiological health and neurological well-being.

For further information visit the [Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture](#).

Nature-Inspired News

[Penn State Students Present Beautiful Landscape Designs for Stormwater Management at the Artful Rainwater Event](#)

[How Reverse Engineering Nature Can Spur Design Innovation](#)

Recommended Reading

[A Natural History of the Senses](#)

By Diane Ackerman

From The Book:

Diane Ackerman's lusciously written grand tour of the realm of the senses includes conversations with an iceberg in Antarctica and a professional nose in New York, along with dissertations on kisses and tattoos, sadistic cuisine and the music played by the planet Earth. "Delightful . . . gives the reader the richest possible feeling of the worlds the senses take in."--
The New York Times.



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