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Helena vanVliet Architect, LLC

Restorative Biophilic Design

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The Love in BioPhilia

"We cannot win this battle to save species and environment without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature - for we will not fight to save what we do not love." ~ Stephen J Gould

Recently I attended the [Living Futures](#) un-Conference in Seattle, in particular the all-day Biophilic Summit.

It was my first time there, and I came away realizing that what we, the 1000 + attendees, had shared was really a communal celebration of 'bio-philia.' 'Philia' greek: "brotherly/sisterly love, affection and friendship among equals"... BioPhila transforms 'Eros' into 'Agape', through reverence for life, a sense of urgent stewardship, through dignity granted to ourselves and our fellow species.



Living Building

"The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope." ~ Wendell Berry

From the vibrant flower logo, the birdsong as backdrop to the conference, to the ever present verdant leafy images, from animal voices to the morning Chi Gong exercises where 1000 people channeled the solidity and strength of a mountain... to me, it all felt like the *Philia* in *Biophilia*, permeating the conference.

Sustainability with the gloves off: personal; emotional connection welcome; deeply caring and full of hope. Community embodied.

Nature is us.



Love Will Always Be The Best Survival Tool

"...even if we could find no trace of biophilia, our concern for survival would cause us to invent it.." ~ David W. Orr

It appears, that increasingly we must inhabit a seeming paradox: out of pure self-interest in survival we must learn to act selflessly. Re-connecting with the 'Philia' in BioPhilia makes this seed blossom and bear fruit.

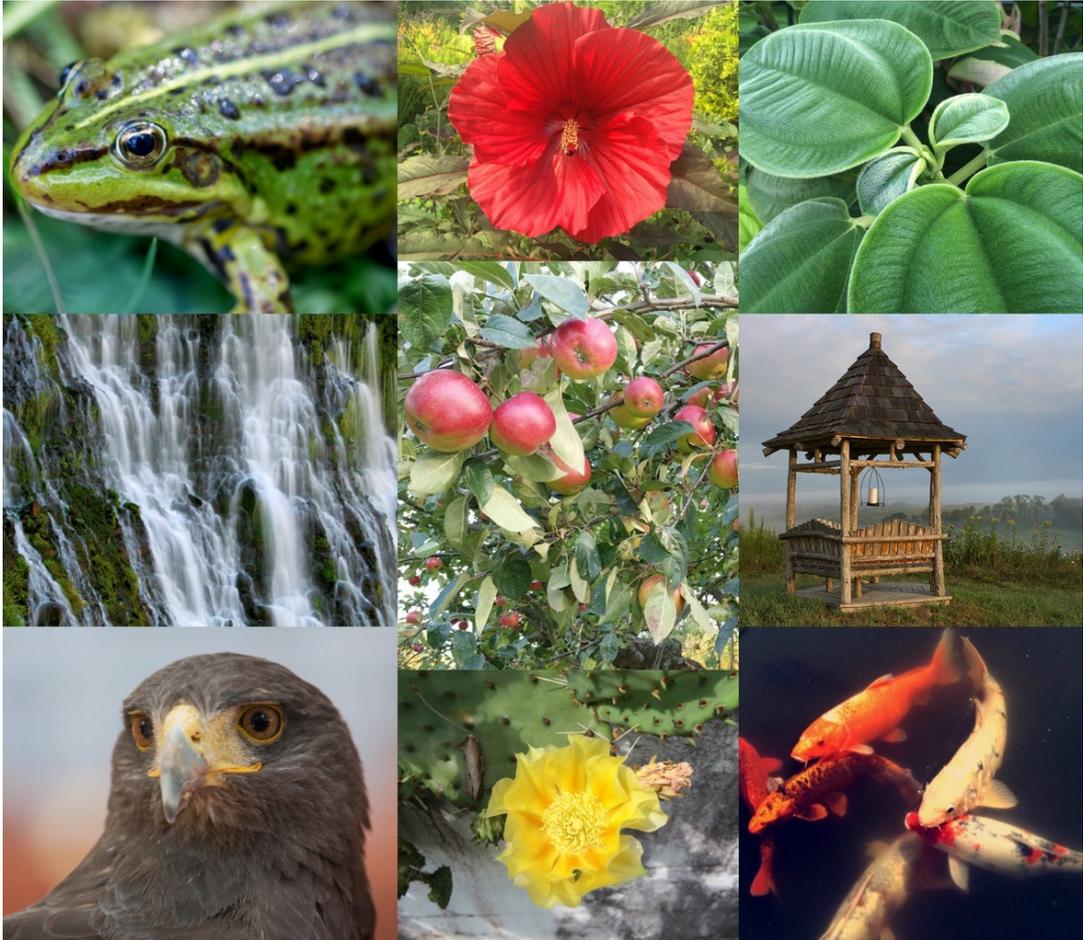
"If we do not permit the earth to produce beauty and joy, it will in the end not produce food either." ~ Joseph Wood Krutch

Unlike the more technical term 'sustainability,' the experience of Biophilia seems to resonate more emotionally; creates a sense of value deeply felt. Something precious, vital, something closely related to our very humanity. A sense of sanctuary under siege. Biophilia seems to be about innate connection, about celebration of life, about Hope.

Time and time again I have experienced the relief of joy in folks, the sense of empowering participation, when 'sustainability' moves into Biophilia. It's a choice for intimacy with the life that sustains us. A choice against isolation and despair.

In his book "[Hope is an Imperative](#)," David W. Orr asks: "Why is it so hard to talk about love, the most powerful of human emotions, in relation to science, the most powerful and far reaching of human activities?" He continues "Science, at its best, is driven by passion and emotion. We have emotion for the same reason we have arms and legs: they have proved to be useful over evolutionary time."

Lets always remember that our emotional brain, our very physiology did not develop in a lunar landscape but in a richly bio-diverse environment.



The Biophilia Revolution

"Is it possible, that humanity will love life enough to save it?" ~ E.O Wilson 1984

Expanding on Wilson's question, David W. Orr in his essay 'Love it or Loose it: the coming Biophilia Revolution' (excerpt from 'Earth in Mind' 2004) asks "if we do love life enough, what is required of us?"

The answer, Orr continues, is two-fold:

We need an "efficiency revolution," transforming "how and how rapidly we use the earth's endowment of land, minerals, water, wildlife, and fuels."

Beyond that, Orr states, we need a "sufficiency revolution: what does it mean to live decently?"

While the former is mostly about technology and economics, the latter is directly related to morality, equity and human purpose.

Together they form the building blocks of what Orr calls "the biophilia revolution," which he explains is: "the combination of reverence for life and purely rational calculation, by which we will want to both be efficient and live sufficiently. It is about finding our rightful place on earth and in the community of life, and it is about citizenship, duties, obligations, and celebration."

The two main barriers to the biophilia revolution that Orr narrows down to are

- 1) denial and,
- 2) lack of imagination.

I struck me that the recent launching of the [Solar Impulse](#) solar plane might be a triumph over both denial and lack of imagination. A project so technologically promising, daring, and at the same time stunningly and serenely beautiful.

"The challenge today is no longer to conquer the moon, the challenge today is to conquer quality of life here on earth " ~ Bertrand Piccard, Pilot Solar Impulse



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