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Neuroaesthetics in Architecture: An Approach to Improving Home Life

Every so often, I come across an idea that makes me rethink something I thought I already understood. That happened recently when I read an article by Travis Hendrix, Associate Principal at KGA Studio Architects.

His topic was *neuroaesthetics* — the science behind how our brains and nervous systems respond to beauty, pattern, and the built environment. I'd never seen the term in a real estate context before, but the more I read Hendrix' article, the more it explained things I've sensed for decades walking through homes.

Neuroaesthetics, and its architectural counterpart, *neuroarchitecture*, explore why certain spaces feel comfortable, calming, or uplifting. Hendrix points out that our responses aren't just emotional. They're biological. Humans are hard-wired to react to light, proportion, texture, and spatial clarity. Architects have known this intuitively for millennia, but neuroscience is now giving us the research to explain it.

One of the most fascinating ideas is how deeply our aesthetic preferences trace back to *evolutionary biology*. Infants instinctively respond to a top-heavy triangular pattern — two dots above one — because it resembles a caregiver's face. That early recognition of safety and comfort shapes our perception of pattern throughout life. It's one reason the *rule of thirds* feels so natural in architecture, art, and photography. Ancient builders used

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By JIM SMITH
Realtor®

tripartite forms long before anyone could articulate why they worked. Our brains find harmony in threes.

Another concept Hendrix highlights is *prospect and refuge theory*. Our earliest ancestors needed wide views to spot prey or danger, but also needed shelter from the elements. That tension still lives in us. It's why we love a home with a great view, but not one made entirely of glass. We want openness, but we also want privacy and protection. Courtyards, covered patios, tree alleys, and outdoor rooms appeal to us because they strike that balance.

Neuroarchitecture also looks at how design affects the *nervous system*. Good residential design activates the parasympathetic system — the part responsible for rest and recovery. Spaces with balanced proportions, intuitive circulation, and gentle transitions help slow the body's vitals and evoke feelings of comfort. Ceiling heights, bathroom layouts, bedroom volumes, and even kitchen scale all play a role in how secure or exposed we feel.

Hendrix also emphasizes the importance of *multi-sensory and biophilic environments*. Homes aren't just visual. They're tactile, acoustic, olfactory. Natural materials, daylight, water, greenery, and outdoor living spaces reduce cortisol and mental fatigue. A breeze through a patio, the sound of a water feature (like in the listing below), the smell

of cooking, or the feel of wood underfoot all contribute to emotional well-being.

I'm sharing this not to promote this particular architect, but because the concept itself is worth knowing. Neuroaesthetics gives homeowners a biological and psychological framework for understanding why

certain homes feel good — and how small changes can make them feel even better. Especially for sellers, it's worth considering.

Find a link to Hendrix's full article at <http://RealEstateToday.substack.com>. In it he acknowledges another professional, Chris Turner of Elevate by Design.

Confused About Plastic Recycling? Here's Some Advice.

The plastic recycling landscape is changing fast for homeowners across the Front Range. It sounds almost too basic, but contamination remains the biggest barrier to higher rates of diversion from landfills.

The resin identification code — the number inside the chasing-arrows recycling triangle — is still the official way to classify plastics. But in real-world recycling, especially in Colorado's single-stream systems, the number matters far less than the shape. Processors want to receive bottles, jugs, jars, and tubs, not miscellaneous plastic packaging. That's why the fastest way to sort correctly is to recognize the plastic type visually, without hunting for a tiny number molded into the bottom.

Start with PET (polyethylene terephthalate, #1), the clear, glossy plastic used for water bottles, soda bottles, and many food containers. PET has a slight flex and a signature "crinkle" when squeezed. If it's transparent and bottle-shaped, it's almost certainly PET, and it's universally accepted in curbside recycling programs. These containers are in high demand because they can be turned back into new bottles or spun into polyester fiber. PET remains one of the most reliably recyclable materials.

Next is HDPE (high-density polyethylene, #2), the workhorse of household plastics. HDPE bottles and jugs have a matte finish and a sturdier feel. Milk jugs, detergent bottles, shampoo bottles, and household cleaners almost always fall into this category. Colorado recyclers prize HDPE because

it's easily remanufactured into piping, decking, and new containers. Natural HDPE — the translucent, slightly frosted milk jug — is especially valuable.

Where people get tripped up is with plastics that look recyclable but aren't accepted curbside. No. 3 through No. 7 plastics include clamshells, blister packs, flexible packaging, and mixed-material containers. The chasing-arrows symbol is not a recycling guarantee; it's simply a resin code.

One increasingly common source of contamination is the full-body shrink-wrap label now found on HDPE bottles such as milk, energy drinks, etc. Some of these, like Activia Dailies, have a visible zipper that you can get under with a letter opener. Most, however, require a matt knife or razor to remove them, as I did with the bottle in the picture at left. *These plastic sleeves confuse the optical scanners* that sort PET and HDPE. When the scanner can't "see" the resin underneath, the bottle is often mis-sorted into trash or mixed plastics. The fix is simple: *If the label peels off like plastic film, remove it before recycling the bottle or jug.* Standard adhesive labels, including paper labels, can stay on.

Colorado's largest recyclers — Waste Management, Waste Connections and Republic Services — all give the same guidance: bottles and jugs are welcome, but shrink sleeves should come off. You can leave caps on.

Read the rest of this article online at <http://RealEstateToday.substack.com>.



Deed Fraud Is Surging In Detroit, a Warning for Us

Deed fraud is making headlines again, this time out of Detroit, where a new analysis from *The Conversation* shows just how easily thieves can steal a home with nothing more than a forged signature and a compliant recording office. For readers of my Real Estate Today column in print or on Substack, this will sound familiar. On April 4th I wrote about title fraud, "title lock" services, and the quiet but essential role county clerks can play through alerts to owners of record in protecting homeowners. Detroit's experience shows what happens when those protections are missing.

Scammers in Detroit routinely identify homes owned free and clear, properties belonging to elderly residents, or houses that appear vacant. They then forge a deed, falsify a notarization, and get it recorded by the county clerk's office. In Michigan, as in Colorado, clerks must accept any document that meets formatting requirements. They are not investigators, and they cannot reject a deed simply because a signature looks odd or a notary stamp seems questionable. Once the fraudulent deed is recorded, the thief suddenly appears — on paper — as the rightful owner of that property. Then they can sell the home, take out loans against it, or even evict the true owner.

The article notes that Detroit's high vacancy rates and aging housing stock make

the city especially vulnerable. Many homes are unmonitored, and many owners do not discover the fraud until they receive an eviction notice or a tax bill for a property they no longer legally own. Worse, law enforcement rarely prosecutes these cases. Proving intent is difficult, tracing shell companies is time-consuming, and victims often lack the resources to fight back. Community advocates say the burden falls disproportionately on Black homeowners, compounding decades of housing inequity.

Contrast that with the Denver metro area, where most county clerks have adopted a simple but powerful tool: recording alert systems. Denver, Jefferson, Arapahoe, Douglas, Boulder, Adams, and Broomfield counties all offer free services that notify homeowners whenever a document — deed, lien, or otherwise — is recorded on their property.

I highlighted these systems in that April article. If a fraudulent deed is recorded at 10 a.m., the homeowner may receive an alert by lunchtime. That gives them time to contact the county clerk, notify law enforcement, and involve their title company before the fraudster can sell the home or borrow against it. It also gives investigators a clear timeline and a better chance of stopping the crime before it cascades into eviction or foreclosure.

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