social spaces

Human Nature

it's okay to be human
You don’t need permission to be yourself.
WHEN WE CLEAR OUR HEADS AND TAKE IT TO ALLOW OURSELVES THE FREEDOM TO RESPOND. IT’S OKAY TO SEEK OUT OTHER PEOPLE WHO GET THINGS DONE DIFFERENTLY. IT’S OKAY TO BE WITH PEOPLE WHO YOU SHARE A LAUGH WITH AT WORK. IT’S OKAY TO HAVE IDEAS AND ENCOURAGE US TO BE THE BEST OF OURSELVES. IT’S OKAY TO EMBRACE AND FIND ESCAPE EVEN WITHIN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. AND JUST ALLOW OUR SPACES TO LEAD IDEAS AND ENCOURAGE US TO BE THE BEST OF OURSELVES.
HELLO /
CESTO

For the planned or impromptu, the mobile collection of seating and occasional tables offers a nimble approach to social gatherings.

Designed by Khodi Feiz
CESTO / KHODI FEIZ

Conceived for casual comfort and mobility, Cesto glides effortlessly across the work landscape. The “basket” base can house a stool, pouf, pouf with back, bench, and table, available in a knit mesh or fabric of your choice. Tabletops are offered in several material finishes.
Q1
What is the role of design?

A
For me design is a holistic act, not a specialism but rather a way of thinking. In many ways to be able to contribute creatively is a specialism in itself, whatever the realm; be it strategic—helping create future scenarios and propositions for culture and society; format—designing relevant and beautiful products and furniture for our use; technical—helping industry innovate; communicative—making information and services understandable; or artistic—producing work which questions and inspires. These and many more elements constitute the world of design, and it has never been any different. We approach every project with a unique perspective, making sure we frame the brief in the correct light and that we have a good dose of questioning and intuition built into our process. In a way, it’s a wide-eyed naivety that is balanced by observation, research and insight.

Q2
You describe your design ethos as being inspired by clarity, concept, and context—how do these play out in your work?

A
As a designer I tend to need a few intuitive ‘crutches’ to give my work a certain structure. Throughout the years I have found that the search for clarity, concept and context can fulfill most of the basic paradigms I look for in my designs. I do not use this as a sort of checklist to make sure I answer, but as a sort of subconscious guiding light to drive me to where my work should be. As an example is our Cesto family for Studio TK: The ‘concept’ being a series of basket-like objects that share the same base but change functionality dependent on how you fill them; the ‘clarity’ comes from its pared down formal and graphical gesture, a soft squared form split in half by a graphic separation top and base, which is inviting; and, objects defined by the social aspects of meeting and collaborating within the work domain define the ‘context.’

Q3
What are the most important things you keep in mind when designing for the workplace?

A
Work is changing at a mind-boggling pace, this is no secret! We have learned that as technology becomes more supportive of our personal and professional needs, the spaces tend to be liberated by the old dogmas of the office and the cubicle. Both the temporal and spatial domains have morphed exponentially. Where I work and how long I need to do things are no longer relevant. But at the same time, I believe that the element of social interaction and collaborative endeavors will grow immensely, we no longer can only rely on personal productivity, but rather on social productivity. This will be a large focus of our near future.
It's okay to be SOCIAL
It’s how we get things done

Illus chitchat in the office (March Madness talk included) is not only good for people, it’s good for business. Those are the findings of Alex “Sandy” Pentland, a psychologist and computer scientist at MIT’s Media Lab. Whether they realize it or not, people socializing in the office are constantly collecting information about norms and culture. “We are part of a social fabric,” Pentland says, “and our basic human nature is to pay attention to other people and share mood and attitudes. That’s really the core of who humans are.” In a study that tracked employee moving throughout the office, Pentland found those who had the most social interactions and connections were among the company’s most successful employees.

It’s who we are

Consider six different perspectives that challenge this idea:

00 Intro
Every year, without fail, a slew of news stories proclaims that March Madness brackets and the ensuing watercooler banter will account for billions in lost productivity. It’s no wonder that for some organizations, the mere mention of social spaces makes them bristle. And we get that. On the face, the idea of allowing people to freely mill about and socialize throughout the workday sounds like the opposite of productivity. But is it?

01 The Philosopher
Aristotle once wrote that a human is “by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes this individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.” Even 2,000 years ago, long before the dawn of modern science, the father of western philosophy could see that our social character was inseparable from our identity and our connection to society.

02 The Anthropologist
Of all the species in the animal kingdom, humans possess the largest brains relative to body size. Group that with the fact that a species’ brain size directly correlates to the size of its social group and you can conclude that our large brains evolved to promote human interaction. Using primates brain size as a benchmark, anthropologist Robin Dunbar was able to extrapolate the maximum number of social connections a human could maintain. The number? 150. Interestingly enough, in his book, The Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell recounts the story of Gore-Tex, whose management structure requires they build a new office any time their headcount gets too high. The number? 150.

03 The Neuroscientist
Matthew Lieberman, a neuroscientist from UCLA and author of Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect, makes the case that being socially connected is not just an artifact of millions of years of evolution, but essential to our survival. “In a sense, evolution has made bets at each step that the best way to make us more successful is to make us more social.” His research has shown that even at rest, the brain defaults to a social state; years of evolution have trained resting brains to be best prepared to reactivate within a social context.

04 The Psychologist
Pat Wadors, who until recently served as LinkedIn’s Head of Global Talent, coined the term “DIBs.” In her efforts to address the company’s needs for Diversity and Inclusion, she found something missing from the discussion: a need to (B)elong. “Our brains are hardwired to motivate us toward connection and belonging—it’s how we survive and thrive,” she writes. “Not everyone has that same feeling of belonging where they work, which is a problem. Creating this culture of belonging is necessary for a healthier company, unleashing the very real value of a diverse workforce, and achieving diversity of thought at all levels.”

05 The Recruiter
Surveys conducted by Gallup found that people not only seek connections in the office, but claim the social aspects of employment are among the major reasons they work. While findings span the gender divide, this sentiment was particularly pronounced among women. Women who claimed to have a best friend at work were twice as likely to be engaged as women without a work friend. The survey discovered that a best friend at work meant an employee was less likely to switch jobs and more likely to have a trusting relationship with their colleagues, leading to greater well-being and overall productivity.

06 The Employee
Writing for Gallup, Annamarie Mann summarizes. “When employees possess a deep sense of affiliation with their team members, they are driven to take positive actions that benefit the business—actions they may not otherwise even consider if they did not have strong relationships with their coworkers.”

Consider six different perspectives that challenge this idea:
INTRODUCING /
BOROUGH

Hospitable by nature, elegant by design, the modular lounge collection introduces a casual sophistication to any social setting.

Designed by Christophe Pillet
BOROUGH / CHRISTOPHE PILLET

Borough delivers residential warmth in a flexible system designed for hospitality-oriented lounge and relaxed work settings. Straight and angled-back seating configurations can be specified for perimeter or open applications. Available with elemental pillows, table solutions, and a rattan “privacy” screen.

Detail—The solid wood table with knife edge provides an ad-hoc work surface.

Detail—a chaise option offers a slightly deeper sit.
ON DESIGN

I'm a designer, but I'm also an interior architect, and my goal when doing interiors is not just matching the color of wallpaper and the carpet. It's like making a movie. I need a scenario, and I need to consider the people as an actor. At the end, the environment and the décor tell a story. The world of offices is where we spend most of our lives, and this lifestyle dimension is never taken into consideration as an argument. For me, this is a central argument. If I want to spend my life in an office, it has to have a scenario. I need to be an actor of something, an inclination of a story.

ON PRIDE

I have tried to make a sofa that feeds the technical and physical necessities of working today in terms of function, but in this expression it's friendly, it's warm, it's sexy, it's elegant. It's everything that makes me proud to be able to sit in it. We never express design in terms of pride, but I think this is the most important value in design. Am I proud to be sitting in such a chair? Or am I proud to be working on a table? Being proud of one's own image is for me the leading value of a human being in any environment.

ON PERFORMANCE

Performance for a long time was related to technology, so technology performance in the office was sort of a systemic standout. In recent years, analysis on work is saying that to be performant, a worker needs to have a friendly environment. You can have performant tools, but the people can't work more than five hours on performant tools. They get bored. They lose their concentration. If you provide a friendly, more human, more emotionally and individually connected environment, people are able to spend 10 hours with no problems. The performance here is connected to the quality of life, not the technological aspect or technological dimension of the tools. If we consider this for the furniture, we don't need technical tools that represent the technical force of performance. We need cool pieces of furniture.

ON PEOPLE

The office environment used to be the world of controlling, the world of mastering the complexity. Now we accept that complexity is too complex. We accept a certain mess, let's say, because mess is part of being happy. This is not only in the furniture, but if you see the way people are working today, it was impossible 15 years ago to not go into an office without a tie; you had to conform to the stereotypes. These days, we don't care. We don't care because we want the inside of people.
It’s okay to be comfortable.
EEA proposes that to understand humans, we must understand the environment in which they are adapted to live. While it might seem like a lot has happened over the course of civilization, on the grand timescale of human existence, the last 10,000 years account for less than 1% of our total ancestral experience. This means that humans today are comprised of genetic material adapted and optimized for a life outdoors. While not always explicit, we innately find comfort among nature because 99% of our genes evolved under these conditions.

When we think about biophilic designs in the context of EEA, our response to a wood chair or a plant sitting on a desk takes on meaning beyond a surface-level sensory experience; deep within the folds of our brain, they are triggering one of our many ancestral adaptations. When we find comfort in an outdoor-inspired setting, it’s because it provides a similar type of emotional security that a fruiting tree may have provided a distant descendant foraging for food. It’s among the same reasons it’s believed that the gift of flowers provokes such a warm and appreciative response. Beyond the gesture, our primal brain is correlating the flowers with food, and signaling to the survival receptors that it’s okay to lower our anxiety levels.

As EEA suggests, the positive impact of biophilic design is more than mere happenstance; it’s ameliorating the discord we experience in a manufactured workplace. That is to say, the world we live in today, if not for these biophilic imprints, isn’t aligned with the way our brains evolved. Steel beams, artificial light, and manufactured cubicles as far as the eye can see look nothing like the lush landscapes we once roamed. An embrace of natural elements helps connect the functional needs of modern business and the emotional needs of our primal mind. From that perspective, biophilic design is not just an aesthetic, but a connective tissue realigning us with two million years of human history.

Among the many things social spaces provide is escape. And among the many ways design can signal this is through a mix of natural elements, be it indoor plants, large floods of natural light, or wood finishes. These biophilic design considerations are nothing new. But what’s interesting is how pervasive they are. Today, you can’t flip through an A&D publication without seeing a workplace with big glass windows, exposed timber beams, and succulent walls as far as the eye can see. It’d almost be a cliché if it weren’t true. In our quest to understand what makes us human, it got us asking, why are we captive to nature’s allure and all its creature comforts?

Imagine for a moment you’re transported back in time. You are among a small clan of hunter-gatherers, who just like their ancestors, spend each day roaming the countryside in search of food and water. Your clan settled in this area because the forest growth provided just enough camouflage to hunt, and just enough exposure to avoid ambush. Survival is your daily mission. One day, you decide to trek out to one of your reliable watering holes when you stumble upon a tree that has begun flowering. It signals to you that in a matter of weeks the flowers will become fruit. For now, you can relax, because you’ve just secured your next few meals, significantly improving your chances of survival.

For nearly two million years, this was the way our ancestors lived—off the land and among nature. And while we mostly abandoned the hunter-gatherer lifestyle 10-12,000 years ago, it left an indelible impression on the modern psyche. It’s among the reasons why people who spend time outdoors report reduced stress and improved mental restoration. Or why employees who keep a plant on their desk are found to take less sick leave. The comfort we seek and the well-being natural elements afford is not coincidental, but rather, rooted in a theory called the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (EEA).
WELCOMING / ARTIFORT + STUDIO TK

Over 125 years of design heritage and craftsmanship. A new partnership brings four iconic collections to the social office.

/
Contoured to embrace the human body, the fully upholstered armchair and ottoman allow people to sink into work. Sitting atop a pedestal base, Pala’s lounge design can make a statement with either single or duotone fabric configurations.
BESO / 2015
KHODI FEIZ

Sophisticated profiles. Exquisite proportions. A chair, armchair, lounge, and barstool, delivered in multiple base styles and available with metallic, powdercoat colors, and wood finishes, the Beso collection offers a comprehensive palette for rendering the new work landscape.

Detail—Beso, Spanish for "kiss," alludes to its signature design expression.

Detail—A warm wood finish gently cradles the seat.
NINA / 2000
RENÉ HOLTEN

An expression of space age nostalgia, Nina is an icon in its own right. Versatile and generously comfortable, the chair is ideal for collaborative and hospitality settings. The unique circular hoop composition provides optimal back and arm support that affords users a palette of postures.

Detail—A flowing back and arm design encourages moments of rest.

Detail—The circular back allows for extended use.
KALM / 2015
PATRICK NORGUET

The protagonist of any lounge setting, or a personal nest to activate between spaces, Kalm’s enveloping contours and full headrest invite people to work or escape in comfort. The chair and complementary ottoman are available in either a 4-star swivel base or a refined wood for static use.
ARTIFORT / 2018
For over 125 years, Artifort has produced some of the industry’s most iconic designs. From the Netherlands to the world over, their collections can be found everywhere from homes and offices to the Museum of Modern Art.

ALKI / 2017
Rooted in Basque Country, Alki draws upon the region’s rich artisan traditions and the quiet beauty of its natural surroundings to design pieces that blend ancestral techniques with modern craft.

B&B ITALIA / 2013
A name synonymous with Italian design, B&B Italia epitomizes excellence. Built around a singular vision, their approach to contemporary design has forged a path all its own.

STUDIO TK / OUR PARTNERSHIPS
A social space is only as good as the people—and products—it brings together. That’s why we partner with artisans and icons of industry, curating designs that invite a broader conversation.
Like a playground to a kid or a pantry to a chef, social spaces are whatever we choose to make of them.

According to seminal research by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, intrinsic motivation refers to a natural instinct “to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and to learn.” As opposed to extrinsic motivations that are influenced by factors outside oneself, intrinsic motivations are inherent in an activity.

Where does our intrinsic motivation come from? Intrinsic motivation is an innate human quality, not a learned behavior. Researchers believe it is a means of expression, and each of us has the capacity to engage in a continuous exploration of our environment in pursuit of ongoing discovery and learning. Dopamine is critical to the neurochemistry of this “seeking” system, and is also highly correlated with increased creativity and cognitive elasticity.

What happens when we inhibit our intrinsic motivation? Solving the candle problem requires, quite literally, out-of-the-box thinking. Consider the following study performed by psychologist Sam Glucksberg: Participants are given a candle, a box filled with thumbtacks, and a set of matches, and asked to attach the lit candle to the wall without allowing wax to drip on the floor. They are split into two groups. Participants in Group 1 are told they are being timed to establish a solution…

What’s the big takeaway? As the study showed, rewards incentives can backfire when attached to tasks requiring creative problem-solving. They narrow a participant’s focus, dull their inspiration, and create a type of tunnel vision that impacts their ability to consider new avenues for discovery. But this is ultimately bigger than just incentives. Other external impositions, like micromanagement, arbitrary deadlines, punishment avoidance, and even highly controlled work environments can all impact intrinsic motivations and, thus, creative output. Once an external force is imposed on an individual, motivations change—from doing it for oneself to doing it for someone (or something) else.

At their best, they defer to our sense of individualism and autonomy, recognizing that every task, every deadline, every workstyle, and every moment throughout our day is different—and who better to decide what type of work space is best suited to meet our needs than us. But it goes deeper than just respecting our individual choices. At the core, social spaces are helping nurture and facilitate what intrinsically motivates us, and when we realize the power of these intrinsic forces, it can shape how we create a space and a work culture that tap into a company’s ability to solve difficult problems and generate breakthrough ideas.

1) Expand the palette of options—By offering more social spaces reflecting a range of seating and table configurations and postures—for both individual and group work—employees are empowered to choose the type of workstation best suited for the task.

2) Embrace IQ and EQ design thinking—Social spaces can be designed with intention—but without asserting an agenda. Create spaces that balance an emotional pull (EQ) with a logical flow (IQ) to encourage exploration, discovery, and the occasional happy accident.

3) Purpose—Connecting their efforts to personal mastery, desire to continually learn and develop, and a genuine sense of contribution, leaders most effective at harvesting the fruits of an individual’s intrinsic motivation:

1) Autonomy—Ensuring they have agency over solving the problem, and subsequently were personally invested in seeing it through to the end.

2) Competence—Supporting their skill set can produce boredom. In the end, a task can create anxiety, while an overmatched individual’s intrinsic motivation?

3) Purpose—Connecting their efforts to personal mastery, desire to continually learn and develop, and a genuine sense of contribution, leaders most effective at harvesting the fruits of an individual’s intrinsic motivation:

1) Autonomy—Ensuring they have agency over solving the problem, and subsequently were personally invested in seeing it through to the end. For participants in Group 2, the reward undermined their autonomy and inhibited their intrinsic motivations. They were no longer pursuing a solution for personal reasons, but to satisfy the interests of an external reward.
THOUGHT STARTERS / SOCIAL SPACES

No two cultures are alike. No two spaces are the same. Here are just a few ideas to create a space fit for every culture.

LOUNGE AROUND

DAYDREAM ABOUT GO WORK. IT’S OKAY FROM CULTURAL HUB INSPIRES. IT’S OKAY TO CALL DIBS FROM A TABLE OVER DAYDREAM ABOUT THE CAFÉ AS YOU WANT TO WORK. IT’S OKAY TO GET COFFEE WITH STUCK BETWEEN A PUBLIC SQUARE IN KAY TO CALL DIBS.

studio tk
Human Nature
CategorY /
LoungE

Lounge settings capture the essence of “life at work” by leveraging familiar home and hospitality metaphors, including living rooms, hotel lobbies, social clubs and more.
Greeting spaces put company values on display to welcome employees as they kick off each morning. For arriving guests, they are where impressions are made and expectations are set.
CATEGORY / COLLABORATION

Optimized for team-oriented productivity, collaboration-driven spaces create the ideal environments for workshops or for getting work done.
CATEGORY / BETWEEN

Between spaces link together office clusters, creating the ideal environment for serendipitous get-togethers, on-the-go meetings, and impromptu gatherings.
For morning, lunch, or late afternoon, the café’s communal quality can simultaneously support individuals working alone and teams working together.
Amid the continuous movement of people, public settings offer a place to pause as well as create opportunities for serendipitous connection.
CATEGORY / CULTURAL HUB

Blending multiple settings into a centralized destination, the culture hub is ideal for happy hours and small group events as well as larger celebrations and all-hands meetings.

CATEGORY / PERSONAL

In social spaces optimized for personal work, employees can find focus for their heads-down projects or inspiration in times of undisturbed reflection.
TO FIND A BETTER V
BE YOURSELF EVEN
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