



with Jenny Rice

# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF WOOD

Cabinet manufacturers, and the many designers in the industry, already know intuitively that the design and styling of products and interior spaces play a role in alternating the emotional states of consumers toward their products.

For example, some hospitals are currently being designed to maximize the use of wood and natural light to create more “therapeutic” spaces for recovering patients. And it has been previously determined that the natural variability of wood induces different impressions in individuals. This effect appears to vary by culture.

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The natural environment has a beneficial effect on stress reduction, psychological health and well-being; but while many studies have been conducted to determine the physical health effects of different aspects of our homes, little has been done to investigate their psychological impacts.

A new movement is slowly beginning to take shape across the continent and around the world. “Healthy homes” are appearing out of concern for the environment and personal health, and demand for such homes is poised to increase.

To fully grasp the meaning of health within our homes, it is essential that the psychological effects of our homes be uncovered. In other words, do the materials that we use to furnish our homes affect us, and in turn, our psychological well-being? Are some materials more beneficial than others in terms of how people emotionally respond to them?

As related to specific products, the study of how people’s psychological health and well-being can be connected to wood used in applications such as kitchens, furniture and flooring is a new and relatively unexplored area.

A recent study was conducted to determine if increased psychological well-being could be attained from wood used in interior finishing applications, as opposed to the use of other more industrial or synthetic materials, like steel, concrete and plastics.

Knowledge of these effects could have potentially far-

reaching implications for designers and manufacturers of wood products seeking to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Results from the study point to an opportunity to market wood in an entirely new and innovative manner.

This study attempted to better understand this phenomenon by mapping out people’s perceptions of wood used in interior applications. Specifically, the aim of this exploratory study was to determine the types of environments that appearance wood products can create, and to gauge whether the use of these types of products could have positive impacts on people’s emotional states.

The findings suggest that people’s response to wood is, for the most part, extremely positive, with subjects generally showing a strong preference for rooms containing many wood details. There also appears to be a strong belief that the use of wood can help to create healthful environments, and commonly evoked descriptors for wood rooms include “warm,” “comfortable,” “relaxing,” “natural” and “inviting.”

The reasons underlying these findings are complex and further exploration rooted in the field of environmental psychology is warranted, but one has to ask, “Can this information be used in the development of marketing and differentiation strategies for designers and manufacturers of appearance wood products?”

In the past, wood has been seen as simply an aesthetic and structural material, but through this research it can be seen that wood is much more. With the addition of appealing attributes related to health, wood has the opportunity to be viewed in a new light and gain new competitive advantages over other manufactured and unnatural products. ■

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