

**MEDIA COVERAGE**

**PUBLICATION:** FMX  
**DATE:** SEPTEMBER \ 2007  
**PROJECT:** NOKIA MUSIC (BRISTOL), BEVAN BRITTAN LLP (BRISTOL)

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INTERIORS

# Nature **trail**

*We may spend most of our time indoors, but we still take every opportunity we can to surround ourselves with plants and images of the outside world. Amelie Savoyard finds out why*



We may have suspected it for a long time, but it has now been proved beyond reasonable doubt. The natural world is good for you. A new report called Natural Thinking, produced by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), brings together various pieces of research into the effect that the natural world has on people. These include a study on patients recovering from gall-bladder surgery, which compared the lucky people who had a view of trees from a window with those who could see only a brick wall. The tree group had

shorter post-operative stays, fewer negative comments and fewer post-operative complications such as nausea and headaches.

Nature can also be extremely important in dealing with that most 21st century of conditions: stress. In another study quoted in the RSPB report, stressed-out students were divided into three groups; one was shown videos of traffic, another of a shopping mall, another of nature. No prizes for guessing which group showed the best response in terms of their stress levels.

'The science behind this is indisputable,' explains Lynda Francis of PHS Greenleaf. 'Stress is easily measurable and so we can be pretty certain about this. Alpha-wave activity in the brain indicates a more relaxed state. Alpha waves are increased when you look at plants, especially if they have flowers. And,' she continues, 'as well as the psychological benefits, they are good for us physically. Plants are natural "air cleaners", whose leaves, stems and roots actively remove the impurities that come from photocopiers.'

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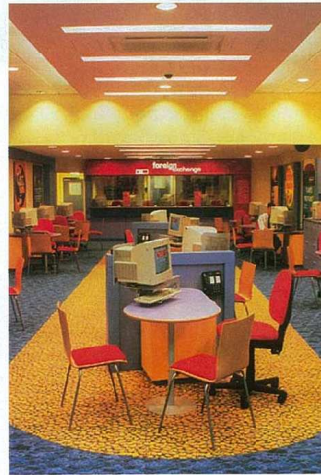
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Far left: 'Green' space dividers at the new London HQ of property company Lend Lease. Left and below: Claremont brings the great outdoors into Nokia Music's offices. Bottom: Milliken's beach-themed carpeting reflects Thomas Cook's identity



computer screens and air-conditioning units. They also take carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with oxygen.'

According to the FIIIS/FMX quarterly survey on the subject published at the end of last year (October 06), the health benefits of plants are already widely known in FM facilities. According to the survey, almost every workplace in the UK has plants of some sort and nearly a quarter of facilities managers recognise the health benefits of plants. 'That's encouraging,' says Francis, 'but with

some definite room for improvement. Then again, it's not just about health. Nowadays plants are used in the workplace to make a statement. Bold plants and containers have become the norm. A business with plants is often perceived to be more affluent than one without, but it's often the staff themselves who are now the driving force behind plants in the workplace.

'It's a proven fact that plants make us feel happier and calmer and have a positive psychological effect on us,' she says, 'so it

makes sense introducing them to our working environment. If you're not convinced then take this simple test. Place a few plants in your waiting area or a public place and watch how people automatically sit near these plants. Plants are real people magnets and just by looking at plants or plant images we experience the same calming effect as watching a tank full of tropical fish – plus plants are easier to look after.'

We may know more about the science behind it nowadays, but people have always

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Artworks Solutions brightens the walls of Bristol-based law firm Bevan Brittan with glowing natural imagery

understood the link, according to Ken Bundy of Claremont Group Interiors. 'There's a lot of it about, that's for sure, but this has always existed to some extent,' he says. 'People have always wanted to bring the outside world into the building. What you do see are various trends in our approach. So at the turn of the millennium there was an awful lot of planting grass inside, having streams running through the office, that sort of thing.'

Bundy believes that things have moved on now. As with so many things, the desirable has also taken on a practical aspect. 'What I see at the moment is people doing things like making natural elements practical,' he says. 'So you see space dividers made of hedgerows and boxes of pebbles. It's practical and not just to do with the environment, and it also adds a lot of texture to the environment. I think another aspect is the way that plants can be used as a way of improving air quality in conjunction with natural cooling systems. I don't believe we're there yet, but it will come in the medium term.'

According to John Sulzmann of Artworks Solutions, which supplies corporate branding products, including partitions, signage and product displays, our desire to be linked with the outside world is so powerful that natural imagery can be just as important as real plants. 'It's always great to introduce natural elements to an interior,' he says. 'It's common

sense in many ways. People are people and prefer to be surrounded by the outside world. It makes them feel better and they can connect easily to it. One factor that is helping us to address the need to bring the outside into the building is technology. So digital imaging allows you to put whatever image you like on things and also allows you to manipulate the material.'

Another firm that is aware of customers demanding a sense of nature in their interiors is Milliken Carpet. 'What we are seeing is a growing demand for natural imagery on products,' says Carol Appleton of Milliken. 'I think in many ways the trend to depict nature in the interior is a reflection of people's growing concern for the environment. Of course, planting a tree indoors isn't going to make a great deal of difference to major issues such as global warming, nor is depicting natural elements on products, but it is an interesting signifier of the way people are thinking – and you hope it also reflects the practical steps they are taking to minimise their environmental impact.'

'So what we see is this trend for clients to want natural imagery on products coupled with a far greater focus on our environmental credentials as a supplier. The two often go hand in hand, but the former isn't necessarily tied in to green issues. For example, we supplied Thomas Cook with carpet that depicted a beach

in their stores, but that is obviously far more about their identity than anything else. What that does show is that organisations often have a variety of motivations.'

Sulzmann agrees. 'This trend for natural imagery is not necessarily an environmental thing, but that is often an important motivation for people when developing designs, given the current eco-friendly agenda,' he says. 'I think it's important that this is not just seen as another type of greenwashing, however. People, be they suppliers or clients or employees, are generally smarter than that and will react strongly against any attempt to use imagery in a way that doesn't reflect reality.'

A trend it may be, but it is one that will be with us for some time, according to Francis. 'The fact is that as a nation we certainly love our plants, and if we can't get the real thing indoors, we're usually happy to settle for just looking at images of them.'

Well, it's only natural **fmx**

#### Further information

[www.artworks-solutions.com](http://www.artworks-solutions.com)  
[www.claremontgi.com](http://www.claremontgi.com)  
[www.milliken地毯.com](http://www.milliken地毯.com)  
[www.phs.co.uk/greenleaf](http://www.phs.co.uk/greenleaf)

For a copy of the RSPB report, go to [www.rspb.org.uk/images/naturalthinking\\_tcm9-161856.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf)

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