



March, 2014

## From Square to Round

What sort of place do you like to go to sip a cup or two? In other words: What do you want most from your coffee shop?

When it was time to re-think their stores and rejuvenate their brand, Starbucks reached out to hundreds of their customers to ask them just that question.

The answer, it turns out, had nothing to do with coffee, but how their customers feel when they are in the store. According to the report: "what consumers sought was a place of relaxation, a place of belonging." As a result, one of the first changes Starbucks made in their stores was to replace all the square tables with round ones because the round tables "protect self-esteem for those coffee-drinkers flying solo. After all, there are no 'empty' seats at a round table." In addition, Starbucks added longer tables for a more communal setting where strangers sit along strangers, yet do not feel alone.



*Helena van Vliet projects*



## Form Follows Function

After the switch from square to round, a new buzz-word came to describe Starbuck's design philosophy: Form follows feeling.

Form follows feeling. Quite a turn-around from the Bauhaus ideology: Form follows function.

"Form follows function" seems to have run its course. Although at its time celebrated as progressive because adaptive to the era of machine and mass production, efficiency-only structures when grouped on large scale, turn out to create depersonalizing, de-socializing places. It begs the question: Can something be called "efficient" if it makes us feel lost, stressed and ultimately lonely? Can a place or design be called "efficient," "progressive" or even "green," if people don't feel energized, relaxed, and ultimately happy living in it? How green is a "green" building, if its

machine-like efficiency fails to nurture physiological well-being?



Helena van Vliet projects

## Form Follows Feeling

What if we redefined efficiency in place and building design as something that makes us demand physiological well being at the very core?

What if we created only buildings and places we will want to use and re-use happily over time, which age gracefully, work well within the ecology of place and community? What if our buildings did not achieve "efficiency" at the expense of beauty, but instead fostered deep ecological connection and understanding by their very design?



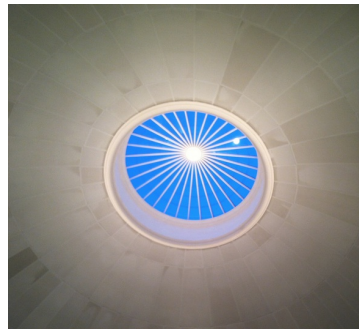
## From Square to Round: an Ode to the Circle

Think of that round table, or circle. Used often in biophilic design, the circle is a common and universal sign.

Writer and design critic Jessica Helfand offers a brief and beautiful history of humanity's favorite shape:

*"The circle has no beginning and no ending. It is unbiased, solid and unwavering in its geometric simplicity, denoting unity and eternity, totality and infinity. It represents the image of the cosmos, the cycles of the seasons, the life of man and the orbits of planets around the sun. In astronomy it indicates a full moon; in meteorology, a clear sky; in alchemy it is the symbol for chemical change; in cartography it represents a village, town, or community. Over time and across multiple cultures, the circle has come to represent an ideal of unsurpassable perfection: it eludes mathematical exactness, thereby reminding us that nothing is exact, even in mathematics. In this manner; it is the essence of all that is natural, primordial, and inescapably human."*

The circle represents the most inclusive of shapes. Everywhere in nature and as in our own bodies, curves and circular joints provide transition and flexibility. They create potential for fluid overlap, for natural movement and for more directional lines to come to graceful resolution.



Photos by Helena van Vliet



Helena van Vliet photo

## Nature-Inspired News

Biomimicry (Scene from "Elemental")



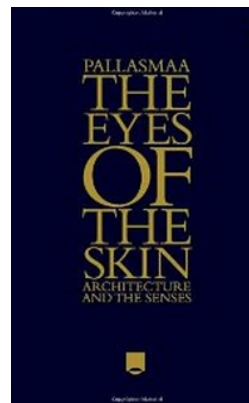
## Recommended Reading

The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses

By Juhani Pallasmaa

### From The Book:

First published in 1996, *The Eyes of the Skin* has become a classic of architectural theory. It asks the far-reaching question why, when there are five senses, has one single sense – sight – become so predominant in architectural culture and design? With the ascendancy of the digital and the all-pervasive use of the image electronically, it is a subject that has become all the more pressing and topical since the first edition's publication in the mid-1990s. Juhani Pallasmaa argues that the suppression of the other four sensory realms has led to the overall impoverishment of our built environment, often diminishing the emphasis on the spatial experience of a building and architecture's ability to inspire, engage and be wholly life enhancing.



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