



## Helena van Vliet Architect, LLC Restorative Biophilic Design

August/September, 2017

### **Holding on to the Green Man of Summer**

*"But the tree is a sister to me, she lives alone in a green cottage high in the air and I know what would happen, she'd clap her green hands, she'd shake her green hair, she'd welcome me. Truly."*

*From "Green, Green is my Sister's House" by Mary Oliver*

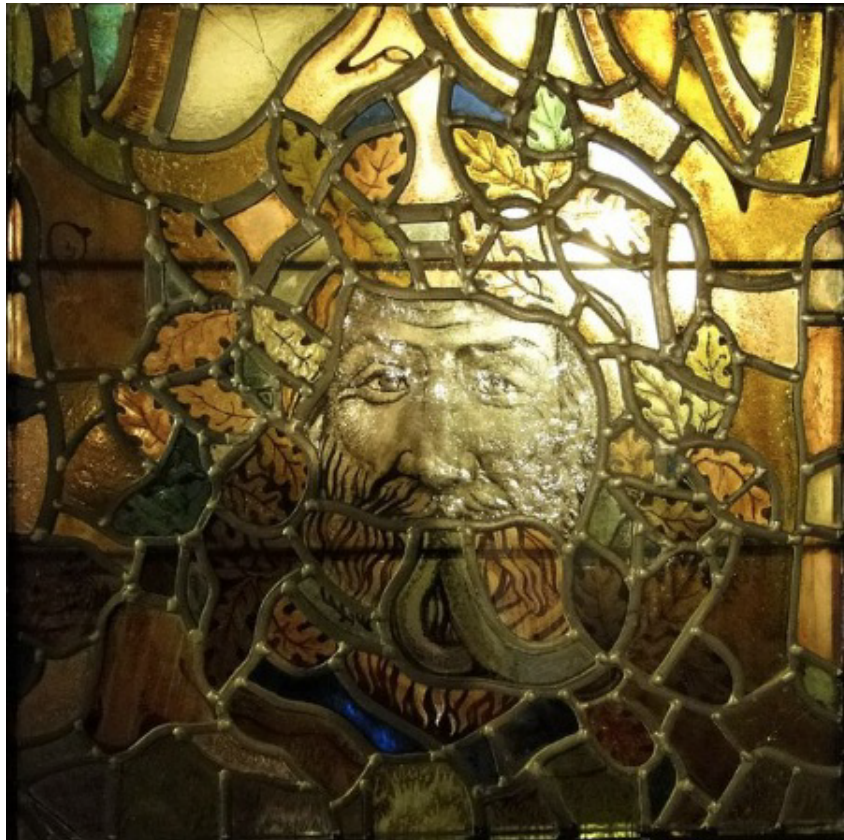
We have sought out the Green Man of summer whenever and wherever we could:

in gardens and parks we have found him. In forests, on hilltops and near mountains. In a handkerchief-sized yard. On a postage stamp balcony. Vacation moments. Personal moments. Memories cherished.

We encountered him in the stunning perfection of a leaf or a flower. The miraculous shimmer of a butterfly. The mouth-watering taste of a vine-ripened tomato. The pungent scents of basil, mint and thyme. In the smell of the Earth that hits us after a warm summer rain.

He spoke to us through the nightly concert of crickets, the luminous dance of fireflies, the iridescent hummingbird so still in midair, the tilt of the head when a Praying Mantis' face regards us in earnest silence.

We tend to vacation with the Green Man.



Since Greek and Roman times and through the ages, the foliate head of the Green Man has been the symbol-image of our deep origin, ourselves artifacts of Earth's evolution. He has been the leafy memory of our innate kinship with Nature, our Biophilia.





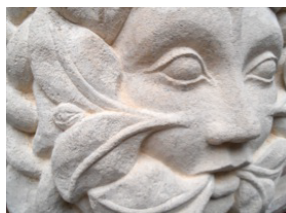
Life flows from the Green Man's mouth. Leaves are his language. Face and foliage are one. He appears in pre-Christian groves and ancient abbeys alike. On temple friezes, contemporary government buildings, garden walls and in stained glass windows. Watching. Bearing witness.





In archetypal quality, he represents our embodied reality designed by nature, for a life with nature.

Inhaling, exhaling we are open systems in constant exchange with our surroundings. Evolution is conservative. Over time it keeps only what's sustainable, what works. The Green Man reminds us. Sometimes smiling, sometimes stern, often sorrowful. He reminds us of our biological selves.







## Our Biological Selves

*"It is no exaggeration to say, that we have learned more about our biological selves in the past half-century than in all of our human history, and as a result of these developments the humanities – sociology, philosophy, psychology, and human paleontology - have been forced to restructure their premises and research agendas radically. Yet architects have remained surprisingly incurious or seem little moved by these events." ~ Harry Francis Mallgrave*



*Annual Green Man Pageantry, Wales*

Indeed, what could better inform us about our shared preferences for the proportions of comfort, the texture of shelter, the colors of joy, the pleasure of fractal and spatial complexities than our inherent biology, designed by evolution for the efficiency of our species' survival.

In her eloquent introduction, entitled *Survival by Design*, to the book *Mind in Architecture*, Sarah Robinson writes:

*“What emerge here are design criteria that have been forged over eons of evolution on this planet - whose imperatives are neither arbitrary nor negotiable. Attention is not narrowed in algorithms, signifiers, and particles, but directed toward the emergent, the affective, the sensual, the gestural and kinesthetic factors that pattern human perception and experience.”*

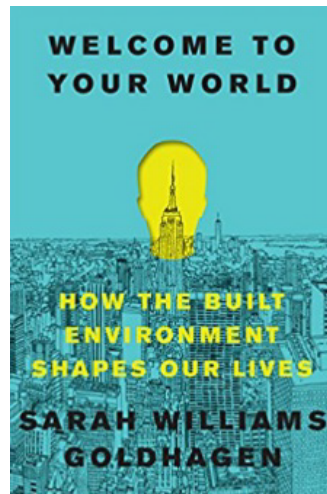




## It's Time

As architects and designers, it's time we acquaint ourselves with this recent revolution in cognitive science and neuroscience, time to incorporate this new research to elevate our work for the benefit and well-being of those whose lives we touch with our buildings.

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## Worth Reading

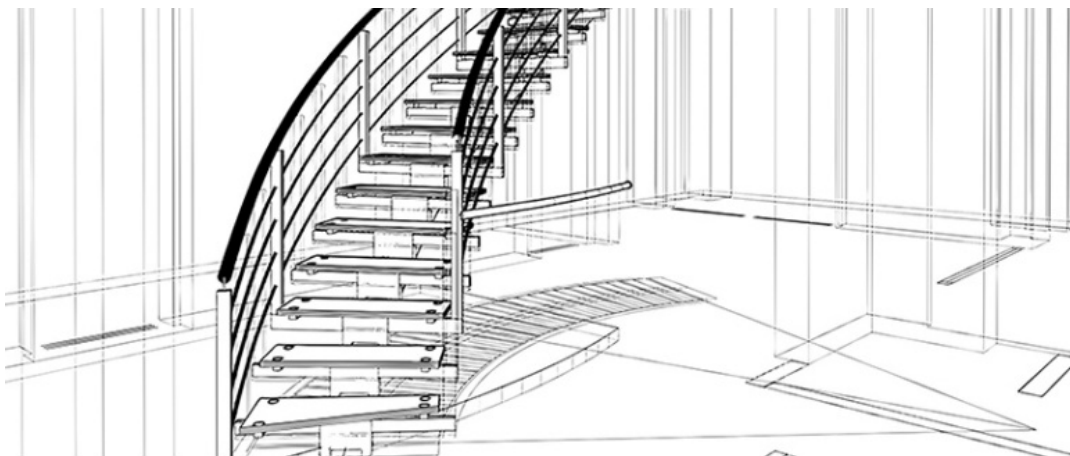
[Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives](#) by Sarah Williams Goldhagen

[Mind in Architecture: Neuroscience, Embodiment, and the Future of Design](#) edited by Sarah Robinson and Juhani Pallasmaa

[Architecture and Embodiment: The Implications of the New Sciences and Humanities for Design](#) by Harry Francis Mallgrave



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This fall I will be teaching at Pratt Manhattan campus again: Biophilic Design 1.0 and 2.0, October and November. [Register here.](#)

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## Worth Noting



Learn more about **Building Places that Re-Connect with the Natural World**. For Architecture and Consulting promoting the Experience of Physiological Health and Well-Being in the built environment, please [email me](#) or call me at: 610-299-7530 for more information.

Now contributing to: [Human Spaces: Spaces designed with the human in mind](#).

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Listen to [Urban Wildlife Podcast](#) where I was interviewed about biophilic architecture and its role in the urban environment. [PART ONE](#) | [PART TWO](#)

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