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## Conference Report: Biomimicry 2016

MARCH 23, 2016 Alexi Drosu Architecture, Design, Designing the Future, Events, FORM Events, Los Angeles No comments

Biomimicry is a systems-based approach to innovation and design that looks to the past. Specifically, the 3.8 billion years of research and development that nature has completed through the ages. For the host of global sustainability issues humanity faces – the changing climate, inadequate access to fresh water, and diminishing natural resources – nature is a lean guide to drive positive change.



This was the framework for the Biomimicry 2016 Conference, hosted by Verdical Group on March 11, 2016 in Irwindale, CA. After introductions from Verdical Group, Living Building Challenge Collaborative: LA, and the Greenbuild-LA Host Committee, the audience dove into a Keynote Presentation by Amanda Sturgeon, CEO for The International Living Future Institute (ILFI). ILFI is a leader in the global push for “communities that are socially just, culturally rich, and ecologically restorative,” and Sturgeon’s presentation drew connections to her own childhood, her background in architecture, and the intersection of biophilia and biomimicry. Biophilia, the “urge to affiliate with other forms of life,” reflects the improved experience possible when our built environment reflects nature and natural systems around us.

Colin Mangham and Ilaria Mazzoleni, founding members of Biomimicry LA, discussed their backgrounds in marketing and architecture respectively, and the role of biomimicry in building envelopes. The lessons learned from natural systems for increased efficiency and elegance in biomimetic architecture spoke to our diverse audience, and resonated with architects and building owners alike.

Mikhail Davis and Lorraine Francis then presented the business case for biomimicry. Francis covered the ROI associated with biomimicry and Gensler’s Hospitality program. Millennials prioritize *experience* more than previous generations, and as the largest growing base of travelers, they are reshaping tourism. Davis provided the Manufacturer’s Perspective, and walked us through the evolution of the carpet company Interface, and the integration of biomimetic design into their product lines. By letting nature guide design and aesthetic, they were able to eliminate waste in the form of excess material and adhesives, while making a carpet product that has a calming effect on occupants.

After the break, Nicole Isle and Heather Joy Rosenberg presented on Biophilia and Resilience, through the lenses of occupant and community health. Daylighting, green walls, green roofs and terraces; design elements that bring occupants closer to nature improve efficiency, decrease staff out-of-office time, and foster occupant health. Rosenberg connected her background in ecology to her work in community development. A resilient community is one that can survive and thrive in the face of stressors and shocks. In a natural ecosystem, those stressors could take the form of fire, drought, or earthquakes. In the context of community resilience, shocks take the form of natural, social and economic hardships. Systems thinking informs community development, and builds capacity for self-sufficiency.

Jamie Dwyer and Chris Garvin followed with a presentation on Scale and Best Practices for Architects, and offered high level reflections on designing for the urban scale. Dwyer discussed the approaches to incorporating biomimetic features in design, as well as showing concrete examples of systems affected by conscious design, and Garvin showcased case studies applying biomimetic elements in multiple cities.

The Q&A at the end of the day brought all speakers back to the stage, and the audience had a chance to weigh in. A high school junior, president of her school’s Biomimicry Club, asked how the panelists could be bring biomimicry into schools, and the audience was palpably moved. The panelists, leaders in their respective fields, are advancing the movement and broadening the scope of impact, and the next generation is poised and ready. —Sofia Siegel

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