

A Book Proposal for

My Creative Space

How to Design Your Home to Stimulate Ideas and Spark Innovation

By

Donald M. Rattner, Architect

[contact info]

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1 Overview | 2 |
| 2 About the Author..... | 2 |
| 3 Comparative Titles | 4 |
| 4 Target Market | 5 |
| 5 Promotion | 7 |
| 6 Annotated Chapter Outline, Specs and Delivery | 9 |
| 7 Sample Chapters | 15 |

1 Overview

Premise

A great deal of psychological and productivity research has gone into discovering how the design of the physical environment can improve creative performance, yet nearly all of it has focused on the workplace, commercial spaces, and schools. What has been largely overlooked is the one place we spend more time in than anywhere else and where more people than ever are now working: the home. *My Creative Space* shows how readers can boost their creative output by applying proven techniques to the design and decoration of their home regardless of size, type, style, or location.

Book Benefits

Readers will benefit from the book by:

- Learning practical techniques to shape a home for peak creativity
- Acquiring insights into how everyday activities at home can boost creative performance at work, play, and school
- Discovering hands-on household products designed to foster creative skills
- Gaining a new understanding of the meaning and psychology of creativity

The book's features will include:

- An accessible text intended for both professional and nonprofessional audiences
- An extensive bibliography for further reading

Several of the tips for maximizing creative output offered in the book run counter to conventional wisdom and practice. For example, many creative professionals who work at home

dress casually, feeling that relaxed attire is more comfortable and helpful in getting work done. In fact, recent scientific research shows that people will generate more original ideas when they are more neatly attired. Psychologists attribute the phenomenon to the sense of elevation and apartness that more becoming clothes instill in the wearer. As discussed at several points in the book, the human mind tends to open up to new ways of thinking whenever it is stimulated by the perception of distance, be it physical, temporal, or in the case of dress, social.

The discovery that the mind is sensitive to the perceived dimension of space further explains why people score higher on standard creativity tests in rooms with high rather than low ceilings. Here again, several longstanding notions about the perception of room height turn out to be wrong, such as the belief that the greater the contrast between wall and ceiling color, the higher the ceiling will appear to the eye. The book corrects this misconception while offering nearly a dozen other effective techniques for capitalizing on the discovery that interior height correlates with creative output.

These are just a sampling of the many useful prescriptions that readers can take away from the proposed title, and the scientific research that underpins them.

2 About the Author

Creativity Architect Donald M. Rattner, RA, AIA holds a BA in art history from Columbia and an MArch from Princeton. He is the founder and principal of Donald M. Rattner, AIA, an architectural and creativity consultancy specializing in the design of creative space in workplace, residential, wellness, hospitality, and retail environments. His work has garnered over a dozen awards for design excellence and has been widely published.

Rattner has taught at the University of Illinois, New York Academy of Art, New York University Division of Real Estate Studies, and Parsons School of Design SCE. Workshop and lecture venues include the Creative Problem Solving Institute, Creative Mornings, Florida Creativity Alliance, Cooper Hewitt Design Museum and many others.

Author of *The Creativity Catalog* (The Creative Home, 2014) and *Parallel of the Classical Orders of Architecture* (Acanthus, 1998), Rattner also has contributed to *Design Professionals and the Built Environment*, *The International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture*, *Residential Architect*, *Traditional Building Magazine*, and *Architectural Record*, among other print and online channels.

His architectural work has been featured on CNN and in *The New York Times*, *Town & Country*, *House & Garden*, *Robb Report*, *Residential Architect*, *Connecticut Cottages & Gardens*, *New York Living*, and *Builder Magazine*, to name a few. Online coverage includes *Design Milk*, *Core77*, *Cool Hunting*, *Interior Design*, *Remodelista*, *The L Magazine*, and *New York Social Diary*. He has been the subject of several interviews for broadcast and print.

A complete curriculum vitae is available on request.

3 Comparative Titles

My Creative Space will appeal to readers in two major areas of interest: 1) creativity and innovation and 2) home and garden. The first category includes books oriented to career development as well as personal creativity, the second to the design, decoration, architecture, and construction of residences.

No book has been published about the home as an *agent* of creativity, rather than in its traditional roles as a *container* and *subject* of creative activity. It is in fusing all three functions of the creative home that will make this book stand out from other titles in these categories.

A sampling of comparative titles includes:

- *Make Space: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration* by Scott Doorley, Scott Witthoft, and David Kelley (Wiley: 2012). Paperback. Color illus. \$49.95. 272 pages. 8 x 0.8 x 8.1 inches. A practical manual on how to design the workplace to foster innovation among employees. The central premise of the book is identical to the proposed title, namely, that interior design can significantly affect creative performance. It offers less in

the way of explanation or psychological interpretation as to the cause of this relationship, and focuses exclusively on office environments.

- *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative* by Sir Ken Robinson (Capstone, 2011). \$27.95. Hardcover. 352 pages. 5.7 x 1.2 x 8.8 inches. A bestseller, this book maintains that creative thinking skills are key to organizational and individual success in the modern world. It focuses principally on the effects of education rather than environmental design on creativity, and so complements rather than competes with the proposed book. Reflecting the deep interest among the general public in the subject, the author's TED talk is the most watched video in the channel's history.
- *Steal Like an Artist* by Austin Kleon (Workman Publishing Company, 2012). \$12.95. Paperback. 160 pages. 6 x 0.6 x 6.1 inches. Another big seller, this inspirational guidebook to unlocking individual creativity is based on the premise that creativity is everywhere and for everyone – a premise very much in harmony with the concept of the creative home. Its publication success is further indication of the substantial appetite among readers for practical self-improvement books on creativity.
- *Elements of Style: Designing A Home and A Life* by Erin Gates (Simon & Schuster, 2014). Hardcover. 336 pages. 7.4 x 1.1 x 9.1 inches. This book is a well-illustrated guide to the decoration of home by a noted blogger and interior designer. Fans of the home and garden genre are a natural audience for the proposed title, and will find its approach to the subject matter to be unique among titles in the category.

4 Target Market

Numerically, the largest segment of the target audience comprises readers driven by a professional interest in creativity and innovation. Consider these statistics on the state of the creativity-driven economy in the U.S.:

- Number of workers in the creative economy: 40 million.
- Creative economy professionals who work from home at least once a week: 30 million.
- Full-time telecommuters or at-home workers: 3 million.

- Nationally, over 700,000 businesses are involved in the creation or distribution of the arts, employing 2.9 million people.

Reflecting these statistics, the number of titles in the fields of creativity and innovation has exploded in recent years as the creative economy continues to assume a greater share of the market. Recent surveys by GE and IBM affirm that CEOs and management professionals believe creativity will be the number one driver of business success in the years ahead, so there is little reason to consider the upward trend a passing fad.¹

An equally sizable audience comprises the millions of creative professionals involved in the so-called gig economy. Current estimates put the number of US workers deriving the majority of their income from freelance and independent pursuits at around 14.4 million.² Many work from home, and will be naturally interested in learning how to leverage their surroundings to improve productivity.

A third readership population consists of people whose interest in creativity is chiefly personal. This includes homeowners who enjoy home design and decoration, hobbyists passionate about cooking, crafting, gardening, playing musical instruments, building furniture, and other popular DIY activities commonly pursued at home, and parents wanting to nurture creativity within the household. Taken together, this is an affluent demographic willing to support their interests, as indicated by these additional figures:

- About \$130 billion was spent on home renovation and remodeling in the U.S. in 2014. Furniture sales amounted to about \$100 billion.
- Hobbyists spend about \$35 billion annually in the U.S. Sewing, gardening, and building furniture top the list of domestic creative pursuits.

Books about personal creativity or that require creativity on the part of the general reader are seeing strong sales as well. Among current best-selling titles, for example, are several coloring

¹ Martin, Colette. "Creativity is the New Black," *Forbes.com* (July 6, 2010); Hobcraft, Paul. "GE Global Innovation Barometer and the World Economic Forum," *InnovationExcellence.com* (Jan. 18, 2012).

² Schepp, David. "Just How Big is the Gig Economy?" *CBSNews.com* (Jan. 18, 2016).

books for adults – a striking sign that people crave an outlet for tangible creative expression even in our technologically driven age. That passion is reflected in the growing concern about the state of childhood education today, especially with regard to cultivating creativity among the young. It is no coincidence that the most watched video in the TED.com series was delivered by noted creativity expert and author Sir Ken Robinson. Apparently, his concern is shared by many; as of this writing, Robinson’s talk has been viewed over 36 million times.³

Taken together, the various demographic groups making up the target audience for *My Creative Space* are large in number, energized by both professional and personal motivations, and of sufficient means to expend significant resources on themselves and their homes.

5 Promotion

Having been married to a public relations executive for many years, the author is well versed in the mechanics and necessity of undertaking a rigorous promotional program to encourage book sales. The long list of press clips, speaking engagements, and published pieces noted in the author’s bio and curriculum vitae attest to his understanding and enthusiasm for this aspect of the project.

To promote *My Creative Space*, the author will undertake the following marketing activities:

- Give talks and workshops to professional and lay audiences around the country on how to design one’s home to optimize creative performance. As noted above, the author has delivered presentations on the subject in a number of venues to very positive responses. Future locations could include home shows like the Architectural Digest Home Show in New York or Dwell on Design in Los Angeles, as well as trade events such as New York’s International Contemporary Furniture Fair or Chicago’s NeoCon.
- Arrange for media interviews on radio programs, podcasts and television/Internet programming. Potential design-focused media targets include Design Matters with

³ Robinson, Sir Ken . “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” Filmed February 2006. TED video, 19:24. <http://bit.ly/3dKCNPT>

Debbie Millman; 99% Invisible; Studio 360; Monocle 24; After the Jump; and DNA Design and Architecture. General interest outlets include TED as well as NPR book-friendly programs On Point and Word of Mouth, among others. HGTV and Netflix present opportunities as well. The author has been previously interviewed for broadcast on CNN and BlogRadio, and by a variety of media channels for profile and feature pieces.

- Write articles and guest posts for relevant blogs and magazines. With a number of published pieces under his belt, the author is well positioned to pitch stories to a wide range of outlets, from design-oriented channels (Dwell Magazine, Houzz) to innovation-focused websites (Fast Company) to sites specializing in creativity (The Creativity Post) to general interest media (HuffingtonPost).
- Leverage the author's website, Creative Space Bulletin newsletter, Facebook and LinkedIn feeds, and 6,000+ person mailing list to raise awareness of the publication.
- Secure endorsements from thought leaders in creativity and innovation.
- Organize a designer show house on the theme of creativity-driven décor. Pair the project with an appropriately-themed local charity.
- Design installations at trade events, art fairs, and other large public events highlighting products and concepts featured in the book. Enlist the cooperation of vendors featured in the book or project to support the effort.
- Hold events at retail stores and makerspaces specializing in crafting, hobbies, 3D printing, and other DIY pursuits.
- Partner with children's museums and art spaces to hold hands-on workshops for young people.
- Run a contest for homeowners in which they submit digital photographs of creative spaces in their homes to win prizes in various categories.

To ensure a successful marketing effort, the author will commit resources for hiring a qualified public relations firm experienced in book promotion.

6 Annotated Chapter Outline, Specs and Delivery

Introduction

The Creative Home

Creativity Defined

What Science Teaches Us About Creativity

The Impact of Our Surroundings on Creative Performance

Creative Space: What Is It?

Tactics Group I: Appearances and Appurtenances

[Note: It is suggested that the Table of Contents take the form shown below in the published book. In addition to the normal functions performed by a Table, presenting the material in this format will also provide the reader with a quick reference and easy-to-use checklist for tracking implementation.]

1. **Designate a creative space.** Thoreau had his cabin, Pollock his studio floor, Proust his bed. Associating one particular place with your creative pursuits will subconsciously trigger a creative mindset whenever you occupy it.
2. **Look at things that are blue or green.** Who would have thought that merely being exposed to these two colors could subliminally improve creative performance? Yet that's precisely what researchers concluded after conducting several laboratory experiments measuring the effect of color on cognitive processing.
3. **Work under a lofty ceiling.** It's been called the Cathedral Effect: people score higher on tests measuring creative proficiency when they occupy rooms with ceilings at least ten feet high. Don't give up if your ceilings fall a little short, though. Discover a few tricks of the trade that could put your space over the top.
4. **Look at things made of natural materials.** Besides flat areas of color, consider materials

like naturally finished woods and stone for your space. Active surface characteristics animate brain activity by stimulating saccadic eye movement.

5. **Look at things and spaces with a lot of detail.** Three-dimensional detail, whether decorative or architectural, can engage the eye as well. Be careful not to overdo it, though. Too much visual stimulation could overload your senses and short-circuit your creativity.
6. **Choose furniture with curved contours.** Here's ten bucks you never would have guessed that furniture with sinuous profiles and softened details spur creativity more potently than furniture dominated by straight lines.
7. **Use furniture to promote sociability.** Some of your best ideas are likely to come from engaging with others. Learn which shapes and arrangements of furniture will encourage people to exchange ideas.
8. **Use flexible furniture.** Get the most creative bang for the buck by choosing furnishings and objects that move, change shape, or perform multiple functions.
9. **Work at a standing or treadmill desk.** The research is still coming in, but a lot of people are standing up for creativity these days.
10. **Apply whiteboard or chalkboard paint to flat surfaces.** Don't limit yourself to a notebook or digital device for capturing and developing creative ideas. These special paints can turn your entire home into a virtual writing and drawing surface.
11. **Display art.** No surprise with this one. Art that gets you thinking gets you thinking.
12. **Display mementos.** We value photographs, decorative objects, and other remembrances of times past for their ability to reinforce memory and our connections to others. But did you know that the feelings of nostalgia these objects bring to mind can also catalyze creativity?
13. **Be an indoor gardener.** One study found that people generate 15% more ideas in office environments when they have a plant at their workstation. By all means, try this yourself at home.
14. **Gaze at greenery outside.** If indoor plants aren't your thing, try orienting your space to catch a glimpse of outdoor foliage.
15. **Take in a vista.** We all dream of a creative space looking out onto a beautiful view into the far distance. For those lucky enough to actually have one, it's even better than you

think: the greater our impression of physical depth, the more our minds open up to unconventional ideas. For the rest of us, a travel poster will do fine. Really.

Tactics Group II: Ambience

16. **Make noise.** All things being equal, on average people generate novel ideas most proficiently when the level of ambient noise reaches seventy decibels. That's about what you hear inside a normally busy coffee shop. Most homes are a lot quieter, but thankfully there's an app for that. Several, in fact.
17. **Make music.** Instead of noisemakers, consider filling the room with your favorite music. Or, better yet, play a musical instrument. It worked for Einstein, it can work for you.
18. **Dim the lights.** It seems counterintuitive, but it's often more effective to brainstorm in subdued rather than bright light. That's because your mind is more likely to wander into uncharted territory when your physical surroundings are too indistinct to focus on them.
19. **Stock up on smart bulbs.** In the old days, dimming and switching on and off were about all we could do to manipulate domestic lighting. Then the Internet of Things arrived. Now we can program our lights to boost brain function, enhance sleep patterns, and improve general health.
20. **Get a filament bulb.** It's a classic symbol of creativity: a light bulb goes off over a person's head at the moment of illumination. So ingrained is the image in our collective consciousness that merely looking at a bare bulb before performing a creative task can improve task completion. Sadly, conventional bulbs are not pleasant to look at, on or off. Try an old-fashioned filament bulb instead. Sometimes going back is the only way to go forward.
21. **Let in natural light.** Your brain and your body will flourish. So will ideation. Honestly.
22. **Adjust the thermostat.** If there's one great advantage to exercising your creativity at home, it's not having to fight the thermostat wars with people unrelated to you. Use that freedom to find and maintain the room temperature most suited to your creative profile.
23. **Pick up the scent.** Sight does it. Sound does it. What about smell? Does our ability to

distinguish scents influence creativity too? Naturally! Why else bring it up? Only, you'll want to know which particular aromas bring about the desired results. Otherwise, it could be all smell and no sizzle.

Tactics Group III: Action

24. **Sleep.** You might think your brain takes the night off when you're asleep, but in fact it's quite busy processing the day's information and solving problems. The key is getting a good night's rest. And capturing those ideas by waking time.
25. **Nap.** One of the best things you can do for your creativity is to nod off for about twenty or thirty minutes a day. Research shows we're more likely to solve problems with a restful break than when we try to muddle straight through.
26. **Work during off hours.** Contradiction alert! Yes, robust sleep and intermittent naps are creativity enhancers. Then again, we tend to be less inhibited in our thinking when we're groggy from lack of sleep. Try staying up late or rising extra early to pursue your creative interests. Ideas might come easier that way.
27. **Daydream.** Sorry, where was I? Ah yes, now I remember. Daydreaming. And for good reason. Daydreaming is an effective tactic for arriving at the coveted "aha" moment.
28. **Take a shower.** Taking a shower is like daydreaming with soap. No wonder people frequently report having useful ideas under the spigot.
29. **Lie down or recline.** At the office, lying down on the job could get you fired. Which is bad policy, because some people do their finest work in that position. Just ask Mark Twain, Edith Wharton, and Marcel Proust. They all wrote lying in bed at home.
30. **Keep pencil and paper at the ready. Even in the shower.** All the good ideas in the world aren't worth a nickel if you can't capture them. But what to do when they come to you at an odd moment, like during a shower? Solutions abound.
31. **Dress nicely.** And here you thought how great it is that you don't have to get dressed up to go to the office, make a quilt, or write a business plan. Sorry, but according to the data wearing something spiffier than sweat pants and a T-shirt will do your creativity good.

32. **Grab a hot beverage.** We're happier when we're warm, and we're more creative when we're happier. Attaining mental bliss does not compel you to work in a sauna, however. The mere sensation or mental image of warmth can elicit positive states of mind too.
33. **Make a fire. Or look at a picture of one.** See above.
34. **Cook.** Cooking exercises our creative faculties like no other universal domestic activity. Plus, it's fun, and you get to enjoy the fruits of your creativity.
35. **Eat brain food.** No magic potions here. Just some tips on foods said to nurture creative thinking.
36. **Have a drink.** Those who enjoy occasionally tipping back will be happy to hear that researchers recently determined an optimal blood alcohol content for peak creative performance. Fortunately, it's not rip-roaring drunk, but imbibing for creativity is still a method most safely applied at home. Teetotaler? Coffee might be a substitute.
37. **Exercise.** If it's an original idea you're after, try pumping iron, doing pushups, or riding a stationery bike. Getting the blood flowing and the body moving enhances out-of-the-box thinking.
38. **Do yoga.** Yoga stretches your body, and some would say, your mind as well.
39. **Take a walk. Ride a bike. Climb a mountain.** Outdoor versions of #36 and #37.
40. **Wash the dishes. Mow the lawn. Vacuum.** Who knew that doing boring chores facilitates creativity? Turns out that performing household drudgery frees up the unconscious part of our brains to bring unconventional ideas to the surface.
41. **Straighten up your desk. Or not.** There are arguments for both sides. Read where science comes down in the debate, then determine which style best applies to you.
42. **Make stuff.** Especially with your hands. Creativity flows from our fingers to our minds as much as it does from our minds to our fingers.
43. **Take up a hobby.** Engaging in side projects at home can bump up your job performance in the office.
44. **Play.** Necessity isn't the mother of invention. Play is. That goes for grownups as well as for kids. And there's no place like home for play.
45. **Play with open-ended products.** Nearly all forms of play benefit the imagination, but

play that allows for multiple potential outcomes rather than a single correct answer or goal promotes creativity most of all. Think LEGOs rather than model building, modular rather than single-piece furniture, magnetic rather than conventional jewelry.

46. **Get a pet.** Feeling too stressed out to be creative? Adopt a pet. Studies indicate that having an animal friend nearby improves mood and mental dexterity by decreasing the brain's production of cortisol, a stress-inducing steroid hormone that inhibits creativity.
47. **Be alone.** Keeping a pet also means never having to be alone. Not that pure solitude and introspection hinder groundbreaking insights. Many of the world's most inventive minds were alone with their thoughts when inspiration struck.
48. **Read.** Books provide exercise for the brain, and tonic for the imagination. Of course, you already knew that. You're reading one right now!
49. **Get out of the house.** Sometimes you need to shake things up to break through a problem. Give yourself a mental kick in the head by setting up creative shop outside the home from time to time. A local library, park bench, or coffee house are known to work wonders.
50. **Really get out of the house.** Take a job abroad, or attend an international university. Studies show that people who immerse themselves in foreign cultures for extended periods of time are more creative on their return than those who stick closer to home.

Bibliography and Further Reading

Specs and Delivery

- Word count: 70,000 - 75,000
- Illustrations: The number of illustrations is open to discussion. The book could be without any images, or contain one or more illustrations per tactic.
- Delivery: Approximately one-third of the manuscript is written to date. Full manuscript to be delivered three months after contract signing.

7 Sample Chapters

Introduction

The Creative Home

Tactic Group I: Appearances and Appurtenances

Tactic #2: Work under a lofty ceiling.

Tactic #13: Be an indoor gardener.

Tactic Group II: Ambience

Tactic #16: Make noise.

Tactic #23: Pick up the scent.

Tactic Group III: Action

Tactic #28: Take a shower.

Tactic #31: Dress nicely.

Introduction

The Creative Home

Several times a year I travel around the country and abroad to deliver a talk or run a workshop based on the material in this book. Like many presenters, I like to engage with the audience at the start of the event by calling for a show of hands in response to a question. My query is simple, but comes with a twist.

How many people here live at home? I ask.

About half the time I'll get a respectable laugh as hands climb confidently into the air. The rest of the time I get puzzled looks and a few nervous titters. In that case I'll usually stroll about the room repeating the question, with my own hand up, until everyone understands that they can answer straightforwardly without fear of falling for a prank.

Once in a while a few holdouts will sit with their hands in their laps. I ask the reluctant responders if by any chance they live at the office instead. (Between you and me, I'm pretty sure some of them do.) Ultimately, most decide to be a good sport after all and join in with those who've been patiently keeping their hands high.

Once that's done, I announce that I won't even bother people with a second poll, which is to gauge whether they have a personal or professional interest in furthering their creativity. Of course they do, I explain, or they wouldn't have come to such an event.

I conclude my abbreviated survey by summarizing my findings. Here's the good news, I say. Everybody here lives at home. And everybody here presumably would like to enhance their creative performance because, in all honesty, who wouldn't?

Then I deliver the bad news. I tell them that I can almost guarantee that every person in the room is underutilizing an enormously powerful creative asset in their possession, something so potent it could substantially alter the manner in which their brain works when they are being creative. For the better, I add reassuringly.

I pause for a moment to let that remark sink in, and perhaps build a little suspense before revealing the identity of this mysterious resource. Then I go in for the kill, the coup de grâce, the denouement.

That asset, I announce, is their home.

And so it is with you. Though we've probably never met, I feel safe in saying that by picking up this book you have signaled a desire to advance your understanding of and facility with creative thinking. That desire might be driven by career, personal enjoyment, child rearing, or some other motivation. I also figure you live at home, in which case I'm reasonably confident that you too are sitting on (or in) a resource for enhancing your creative abilities that is going largely unused.

My goal in writing this book is to show how you can unlock the hidden power of home to boost human creativity and spur innovation. That goes for just about any home you're likely to have. It doesn't much matter what style it's in, how big it is, where it's located, or whether it's a freestanding house, apartment, recreational vehicle, houseboat, teepee, or dorm room. What's important is that you have a place that you identify as your sanctuary, your place of refuge, a safe

harbor that you have carved out from the rest of the world as your own personal space. If you have such a place at your disposal, then you can benefit from the techniques I share in this book.

As far as I'm aware, this is the first work to look at the home as a covert catalyst of creativity. That might sound like a mad boast, given that the world is clearly suffering no shortage of books connecting creativity to the home. The difference between them and mine is in the nature of that connection.

Until now, books about domestic creativity have fallen into one of two categories. The first category contains the kinds of books that treat the home as an object of human inventiveness. These include style books, monographs by and about well-known decorators, architects, and home designers, pattern books illustrating home plans and details, books about historic homes or periods, and works of theory.

The second group references the home as a *container* of creativity. The titles in this category focus on creative activities conducted *within* the home. Cookbooks, books demonstrating how to quilt, garden, paint, build furniture, do home science projects, or bring up creative children belong here. Ditto for books that offer guidance on setting up a home office or running a business out of the home, entrepreneurship being one of many areas of human endeavor now regarded as creative undertakings in their own right, alongside the traditional spheres of arts and crafts.

Here's where *My Creative Space* deviates from the established genres. Rather than approach the home as a hub or subject for the imagination, I am going to explore it as a *stimulant*, an *agent* of creativity. That is, besides sheltering our creative pursuits, or being the product of them, the home can also actively *improve* our ability to engage in them, partly by how

it looks, partly by how it feels, and partly by how we conduct our daily lives within its walls.

What's more, to a significant degree our home exerts this influence on us without our even being aware of it.

That the built environment affects human thinking, emotion, and behavior is hardly an original observation. But it's only in the last several decades that scientific research has been able to verify what people have long understood intuitively. In many cases we've uncovered relationships between external stimuli and mental processing that we never knew existed.

Thanks to these investigations we are standing today on a mountain of information correlating our physical surroundings to creative productivity. For instance, we now know that exposure to the color red diminishes our aptitude for generating novel ideas, while looking at natural foliage increases it. We also know that on the whole we're better problem-solvers after seeing a naked light bulb, and less adept when we're situated in a room with low ceilings. That old saw about having getting some of our best ideas in the shower? It's true, and what's more, psychologists, neuroscientists, and creativity scholars have developed some very good explanations as to why.

These findings are immensely important when it comes to devising prescriptions for enhancing creativity. Without a firm grounding in science, self-improvement programs aimed at sharpening our creative acumen are all too prone to quackery and charlatanism. Or being wrongfully dismissed. Really, does anyone in their right mind honestly believe that gazing at a bare bulb can somehow stimulate idea generation? The very notion sounds far-fetched. Yet that's precisely what a well-regarded research team discovered after conducting a laboratory experiment to test the premise. And once you read their published paper and understand the

historical context in which this curious association evolved, it doesn't seem preposterous in the least.

With so much data and insight at our disposal, it's hardly surprising that the people responsible for shaping and operating built environments would be eager to apply evidence-based design to real-world projects. And so they have, from corporate offices to retail stores, from health care facilities to schools. Yet there is one place that appears to have been overlooked in the effort to capitalize on the power of place to spur human creativity, and that is the home.

I see several reasons for the omission. Perhaps most evident is the lack of institutional motivation. Managers of innovation-driven businesses are motivated by profit and mission to seek out methods for optimizing the creative output of employees. Educators aim to foster the creative skills of their pupils, retailers want to encourage customers to be as open-minded as possible about the possible uses of the merchandise as they amble down the aisles. Home is an institution of sorts, but engendering creativity among its occupants is only one of many purposes it serves, and not a top priority at that. In the eyes of many, domestic creativity is a pleasant pastime to be enjoyed during leisure rather than an imperative for success or survival.

Except, that was then, and this is now. Home has evolved. Among other things, the once firm boundary between work and domestic life has greatly eroded. A large segment of the labor force in developed countries now does business at home either part- or full-time, whether in the employ of outside companies and organizations or themselves. Many of these people are involved in creative disciplines and industries, including art and design, finance, marketing, education, publishing, technology, product development, healthcare, philanthropy, science, and other knowledge-based fields that thrive on skillful problem-solving, information management,

and innovative thinking. If the home was once indifferent to, and in fact, deliberately inoculated from the call of career, it certainly can't afford to be these days. Optimizing a home for creativity should therefore be on the to-do list of anyone who uses their residence for this type of work.

As it should be even if you're a creative professional who spends workdays entirely outside of where you live. Because, let's face it, an office can be among the worst places in the world to be creative in. It's hard to know what aspect of office environments is more hostile to the unfettered production of original ideas--the frequent interruptions, the disruptive bustle, the tugs in multiple directions, the limitations of physical plant, management indifference, or the interminable meetings that drain a person of the will to live. Pick your poison. Little wonder, then, that surveys of working professionals reveal the office to be the setting least likely to foster novel insights. Among the best? The home, for reasons I'll explain in the course of the book.

None of this is to take away from home's traditional role as a locus of *personalized* creativity. Indeed, that role has only grown stronger in recent decades as we've come to understand how vital the exercise of this peculiarly human skill is to our mental and physical well-being. Fortunately, within certain parameters the fundamental qualities and operations associated with creative thinking are the same whether you're devising a Halloween costume out of found materials, launching the next category-busting start-up, inventing a better mousetrap, writing a screenplay, brainstorming a new ad campaign, finger painting, preparing a lesson plan, coding, or coming up with a fresh color scheme for your living room. I say fortunate because it means that the tactics for improving creativity contained in the book are purpose-agnostic, which is to say, applicable to creative endeavors both professional and personal in nature.

So far, I've discussed creativity as if it were a commonly understood concept. In reality

people outside of academia and the world of creativity consulting differ broadly in what they think it is. My next step is therefore to offer up a definition of the term and of several closely related concepts, including *imagination*, *innovation*, and *invention*. From there I'll dive into greater detail about the underlying science of creativity, the psychology of space, and how they can be exploited to the benefit of all.

Tactics Group I: Appearances and Appurtenances

Tactic #3. Work under a lofty ceiling.

WHAT TO DO

Find a creative space with ceilings ten feet or higher, or visually manipulate your existing space to emphasize the vertical dimension.

WHY DO IT?

A study by University of British Columbia researchers found that subjects occupying a room with ten-foot ceilings scored higher on tests measuring creative problem-solving skills and abstract reasoning than subjects who performed the same exercises under eight-foot ceilings.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Mental space tends to move in parallel with our perception of physical space. The greater our

sense of depth, the more open our minds will be to new ideas and fresh perspectives.

In judging the size of an interior space most people will refer to horizontal dimensions. But architectural space extends vertically as well as laterally. The height of a room and the configuration of its upper reaches contribute to our impression of volume as powerfully as our assessment of breadth and length does. It stands to reason that if we think more creatively when we perceive space to be opening up around us, we'll do the same if we intuit that space is opening up above us as well.

That said, the horizontal and vertical dimensions are not without their differences. This suggests that other psychological cues might be in play here besides the ones I discussed in the previous tactic. For example, lateral space runs parallel to the ground plane, which connects it to the earth, while vertical space runs between earth and sky. In contrast to the earth, which is concrete, finite, and very much of the body, the sky is viewed in many cultures as intangible, boundless, and the province of ideas. It's conceivable that an unconscious inclination to associate the space above our heads (not to mention the head itself) specifically with abstract thought and the realm of infinite possibilities helped trigger the improved creative performance of the subjects in the taller room.

There's plenty of evidence in the historical record to buttress my theory. Ever step inside the soaring interior of a great medieval church? No matter what your religious beliefs, there's a good chance you felt a sense of awe, reverence, and even other-worldliness as you took in the space. If so, that was exactly the intent of the medieval masons who conceived and built these structures. They wanted to transport the minds of the faithful from the nitty-gritty reality of the here and now to the ultimate abstraction--the idea of a Supreme Being. And they used height to

do it.

No wonder that the connection between ceiling vertical space and conceptual thinking has been dubbed the Cathedral Effect. It's an almost perfect metaphor for the shift in cognitive processing that has to happen for idea generation to occur.

So, does all this mean you're condemned to creative failure if your workspace ceiling rises anything less than ten feet off the floor? Not at all. For one thing, don't feel you have to implement every single tactic presented in this book in your creative space to reap the benefits of design psychology. As long as there's a preponderance of positive primes or a particular design cue dominates your creative space, the absence or contrary effects of others are likely to be mitigated.

For another, there are plenty of steps you can take to make your ceiling appear taller than it really is. (In matters of the human psyche, what you believe to be true is far more important for inducing a particular behavior than what is actually true.) Some are cosmetic in nature, a few involve structural modifications or the installation of architectural elements. All are designed to emphasize the vertical dimension by leading the eye upwards.

Consider implementing these techniques in your space if your ceilings fall short of the desired dimension, or if you just want to play up the height of your already generously proportioned room:

Apply vertical elements and patterns to walls. Wall coverings and paint treatments embellished with stripes and other vertically-oriented motifs, architectural paneling, and trim or structural elements running in an upright direction will visually lift a room.

Exploit furnishings and décor. Tall bookcases, full-length drapes, artwork in portrait-oriented frames, wall-hung decorative accessories mounted in a pyramidal arrangement, tall mirrors resting on the floor and angled upwards, and standing lamps are among the many interior components you can leverage to amplify the optics of height.

Colorize strategically. You hear a lot of advice on how the color of floors, walls, and ceilings affects estimations of height. Some of it's right, some of it's wrong. To set the record straight, the *contrast* between the color of your ceiling and the color of your walls and floors has *no impact* on height perception. What does matter is how light your walls and ceiling are independent of each other. In a nutshell, the lighter they are the taller your space will seem. According to the research, floors don't factor at all.

Another approach is to extend the wall color up into the ceiling as a border. This tricks the eye into thinking the wall is taller than it is. To magnify the illusion, curve the top of the wall where it meets the ceiling and do away with any intervening horizontal trim, like cornices and picture moldings. Ready for the Full Monty? Do this, then apply the same color to both walls and ceiling. Your eye will have nowhere to stop as it travels up from the floor. (Warning: these last techniques are suited for contemporary-styled spaces only!)

Raise door and window heads. The relationship between the tops of your door and window openings and the ceiling is a crucial determinant of height perception. All things being equal, the higher up the openings the more elevated you'll judge a space.

Embellish what's above. Nothing wrong with a perfectly smooth ceiling, but if the goal is to direct focus to the plane overhead, then actually putting something that will draw attention there is key. In fact, the researchers who uncovered the Cathedral Effect took pains to point out

that subjects had to be made cognizant of room height, if only peripherally, for the prime to work. Light fixtures, skylights, beams and coffers, decorative appliqué, and other features commonly found in residential ceilings will top off your space nicely.

RELATED TACTICS

#2. Look at things that are blue or green.

#20. Get a filament bulb.

Tactic #13. Be an indoor gardener.

WHAT TO DO

Keep plants or flowers in your creative space.

WHY DO IT?

Research shows that the sight of natural greenery can boost idea generation by 15 to 30%, and lead to more creative, flexible solutions to problems.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

That depends on who you ask. A number of experts who have tackled this question start with the premise that our brains have limited capacity to sustain the high level of concentration needed to perform challenging tasks. By some estimates we can maintain total focus only for twenty to twenty-five minutes. After that our minds begin to grow weary and our ability to screen out competing sensory inputs weaken. We need a brain break. What to do?

According to several studies, we can recharge our mental batteries by turning attention

away from the task at hand and directing it toward some nearby plants instead. After a brief period we should feel sufficiently refreshed to return to our activity with renewed energy.

The reason? Simply that it takes far less mental exertion to take in a plant than it does to hunker down on a taxing problem. That gives our neural circuits a chance to replenish themselves before revving up for the next round of directed attention. Hence the name given by researchers to explain the connection between plant matter and mental revitalization: Attention Restoration Theory, or ART for short.

Well, duh, you're probably thinking to yourself. Of course we're going to feel rejuvenated after we stop banging away on a demanding undertaking so we can vegetate for a spell. Nothing magical or scientifically revealing about that.

Except that not all respites are created equal. Researchers have compared the physiological responses among people passively experiencing natural settings to those observing built environments, even relatively placid and attractive ones. I'm sorry to say that nature wins hands down for the depth of its restorative effect (sorry, because I've always assumed good architecture could solve all problems). That goes for human-made objects too. Mindlessly staring at an ashtray for several minutes isn't going to resuscitate cognition to the same extent that gazing at foliage, flowers and forests will. So the question remains: what gives plant forms their unique power to reinvigorate the human mind?

The answer takes us back to the dawn of mankind. For our ancestors roaming the savannas of Africa, the sight of lush, verdant vegetation was a welcome sight indeed. It signified the promise of food, a means to attain shelter and shade, and favorable climactic conditions amenable to the sustenance of life. Advocates of ART and of evolutionary psychology in general

argue that the memory of that positive association has been seared into the collective brain of the human race so deeply that it still influences our behavior today. It's a compelling argument considering that 99.99% of the total time our species has spent on the planet has been within completely natural environments.

The special relationship between human beings and nature comes under the relatively recent concept of *biophilia*, literally, a love of living things. The concept was popularized by the biologist Edward O. Wilson in a 1984 book of the same name. Wilson defines biophilia as "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life." That urge manifests itself in a variety of ways, including in our susceptibility to the restorative effects of ART. It's also given rise to an interest in biophilic design, which is the adaptation of natural forms and processes to the constructed environment.

Another thesis for the creative boost we get in the presence of plants takes a slightly different perspective. Instead of attention fatigue, this line of reasoning points to the reduction of stress as the principal mechanism by which plant forms influence our state of mind. Being in the presence of organic growth calms us by triggering our longstanding association of vegetation with survival. After all, it's comforting to feel you won't be starving any time soon, even if the origins of that fear bear no relationship to present-day reality.

Putting stress at the center of the discussion about nature's influence on us explains a lot. For example, it offers a plausible reason for why hospital patients who spot trees through their windows have a better health record than those who see only hardscape. It would also explain why several studies show office workers to be considerably more productive and creative when they have plants around. As many of us are aware, the pressure to come up with novel products

or services on a regular basis can be pretty trying, especially when we rely on creative work product to make a living. Anything we can do to alleviate that stress will be a boon to original thinking, because stress is the enemy of ideation. Stress causes us to freeze up, narrow our focus, and go into a state of cognitive high alert for the purpose of self-preservation--all conditions inimical to the open embrace of freewheeling ideas.

A symbolic connection between plants and creativity might figure into the equation as well. Plant matter, and nature in general, signify the emergence of life forms, that is, the bringing forth of things that weren't present before. Human creativity is much the same. Out of thin air we conjure up objects and concepts that were previously non-existent (only we do it at a much faster pace than the glacial crawl of evolution). Unconsciously equating plants and flowers with themes of fertility and production could be fueling our motivation to engage in creative undertakings ourselves.

So plants are good. And easy to install and maintain, right? Not if you're one of those people who have a habit of killing them. No worries. You can still utilize a version of this tactic. Experimental data indicate that merely being exposed to visual representations of nature is enough to stimulate divergent thinking. Landscape paintings and photographs, animal carvings and sculptures, even botanic motifs on upholstery, curtains and floor coverings can help put you in a creative frame of mind.

Or just decorate your creative space with a healthy dose of green, a nearly universally acknowledged avatar of nature, growth, and fecundity. Researchers have determined that just a brief glimpse of the color before launching into a creative task can increase performance by a significant measure.

Go green!

RELATED TACTICS

#4. Look at things made of natural materials.

#11. Display art.

#14. Gaze at greenery outside.

#15. Take in a vista.

#39. Take a walk. Ride a bike. Climb a mountain.

Tactics Group II: Ambience

Tactic #16. Make noise.

WHAT TO DO

Subject yourself to background noise running at 70 decibels during creative periods.

WHY DO IT?

Moderate noise levels have been found to make it more difficult for people to focus on detail, which leads us to process information more abstractly.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Cork is popping up everywhere in stylish homes these days. You find it in floors, furniture, lighting fixtures, tiles, wallpaper, accessories, planters, and of course, in its traditional role of pinup board material. Its popularity is well deserved. Cork has a warmly beautiful and variegated appearance evocative of natural growth. It's a renewable material that can be harvested from trees without harming them. It's impervious to extreme temperatures, so you can rest a glass of hot cider or cold lemonade directly on a cork surface without worry. It comes in tiles, rolls, and sheets, installs relatively easily, and is affordable. You also might have heard that it buffers sound.

It is this last property that moved the seminal French writer Marcel Proust to line the walls of his Paris bedroom with cork tiles. To say that Proust was sensitive to noise and environmental distractions would be an understatement. The man was positively neurotic about it. To muffle the clatter of the street he kept his window shutters closed and blue satin curtains drawn. What little noise penetrated these defenses was to be absorbed by the cork or blocked by the ear plugs he wore. Asthmatic to boot, Proust wrote by the light of a single lamp while lying in bed under a fur coat because he feared turning on the heat would dry out the air. Despite the room's peculiarities--or perhaps because of them--Proust rarely left it. Nor has it left us. The room was recreated in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris as a shrine to the birthplace of modern literature.

Proust is not alone among inventive geniuses seeking sensory deprivation during creative periods. Charles Darwin, playwright Anton Chekhov, and composer Richard Wagner were similarly beset by hypersensitivity. Fellow obsessive Frank Kafka described his syndrome in his

signature surreal style when he said "I need solitude for my writing; not 'like a hermit'--that wouldn't be enough--but like a dead man." How happy he must have been to finally get his wish.

That extreme creativity and an inability to filter out sensory inputs have a proclivity to go hand in hand makes perfect sense when you think about the central importance of open-mindedness to creativity. Being amenable to new experiences, subjects, places, and ideas is a precondition of creativity. The more broad-minded you are, the more predisposed you will be to finding those novel connections between distantly related concepts that lie at the root of creative invention.

The problem with off-the-chart luminaries like Proust and Kafka is that their minds are a bit *too* open. Everything gets through. At a certain point there is simply too much information for a brain to handle. Hence the extreme measures they take to avoid being so overloaded by incoming stimuli that they become immobilized.

Thank goodness you and I don't suffer from this affliction. In fact, research shows that most people are actually at their most inventive when they're subjected to a modest amount of background noise--about 70db (decibels), to be specific. The chart below puts the figure into context:

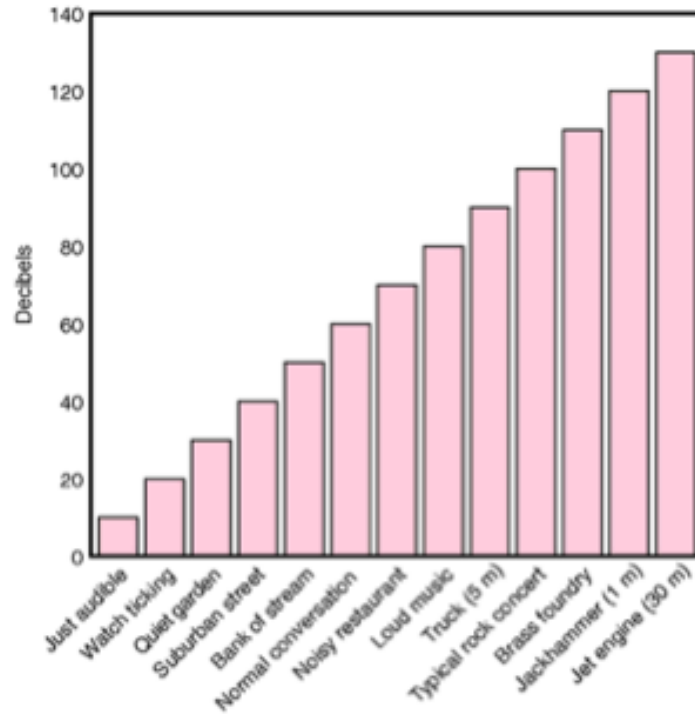


Table 1

Standard sound emission levels.

From the chart you can see that the recommended level runs slightly louder than normal conversation, but not quite so cacophonous as a hot new restaurant on a Saturday night. A favorite neighborhood coffee joint or Starbucks in late afternoon, when energy starts to sag and people get a hankering for a cup of hot java and a nibble, would probably fit the bill.

But let's say you don't want to leave home every time you desire a noise fix. In that case you could simply open your windows or doors to let in street din. That worked for me during my years living in a small apartment in Manhattan overlooking one of the business and noisiest avenues on the island. But after relocating to a quiet street in Brooklyn Heights and later to the nearly soundless countryside of Connecticut, I no longer had ready access to a continuous audio

stream. You might be in a similar situation. What do we do now?

Turn to technology, of course! There are scores of desktop and smartphone apps out there whose sole function is to generate digitized sound effects at the push of a button. Rainfall, thunderstorms, crashing waves, white noise, pink noise, blue noise--pretty much anything you can imagine can be played over your audio system, smartphone speaker, or computer at the suggested volume. One app I've come across even simulates the background chatter of the aforementioned archetypal coffee shop.

The scientists who discovered the correlation between sound and creative performance hypothesize that a placid environment enables us to concentrate intensely on finding a solution to a creative problem. You'd think that would be a good thing, except that narrowly focused attention is exactly what we don't want when we're in the early stages of the creative process. Instead, we thrive on just enough distraction for our minds to be knocked off the prescribed path of linear thinking and into the meandering precincts of undirected idea generation. Once the Aha moment has come and gone, however, it's generally agreed that we should shut off the noise, kick everybody out of the room, and get down to the business of ratifying our newly acquired insights in peace and quiet.

RELATED TACTICS

#17. Make music.

#28. Take a shower.

Tactic #23. Pick up the scent.

WHAT TO DO

Infuse your creative environment with select scents.

WHY DO IT?

Certain aromas are known to improve mood, cognition and creative performance.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Do you have someone at home who does not believe the normal rules of tidying up after oneself apply to them? If so, a solution to your problem could be right under your nose: citrus-scented cleaning fluid.

You can thank a team of Dutch psychologists for the insight. It was their idea to run an experiment in a room with a bucket of diluted cleaning liquid tucked out of sight. Subjects assigned to the room first filled out a questionnaire, and were then given a crumbly cookie to snack on. The researchers observed that subjects who had unknowingly inhaled the aroma from the bucket were three times more likely to clear away the crumbs that fell from their cookie than a control group that went through the same steps in a room without the scent.

It doesn't take much to understand the connection between the smell of cleaning fluid and the act of cleaning up after oneself. Pinning down the relationship between a particular olfactory stimulus and its ensuing effect is not always so straightforward, however. One reason is that variations in gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, age and, most of all, personal experience among subjects can lead to very different associations of scent and memory. One person's sweet smell of success might be another person's odor of horror simply because of events in their respective

pasts. Adding to the general unpredictability of the data is the fact that some people are less sensitive to smell than others.

Nevertheless, we can draw a few general deductions about the impact of smell on creativity. Let's begin with the premise that scent influences mood in a manner similar to music (Tactic #17). By that logic pleasing odors put people in a good mood, while bad odors put them in a bad mood. Good moods promote creativity. Bad moods inhibit it.

That's a start, though a bit broad. Has anyone run laboratory experiments or collected data to show a more direct correlation between a particular olfactory stimulus and improved creative performance? As far as I've been able to determine, only one investigation to date has linked a particular scent to improved creativity, and that was only uncovered in a roundabout way. In 2012 a research group from The Netherlands (what is it about the Dutch that gets them stoked by smell tests?) discovered by way of an experiment on task activation during sleep that breathing in an orange-vanilla scent at night increased problem-solving skills and openness to innovative ideas among subjects the following day. Given the somewhat random selection of scent for the experiment, it's conceivable that other aromas would have brought about the same results.

The value of scent to creativity might therefore stem from its capacity to spark divergent thinking indirectly through mood arousal, stress reduction, and improved cognition, sleep, and feelings of health. Sally Augustin presents a number of aromas and the various behaviors they've been observed to induce in her book *Place Advantage: Applied Psychology for Interior Architecture*. Her list includes the following:

To improve sleep: The smell of jasmine will boost cognition after sleep by helping people sleep more soundly and wake up feeling less anxious. Interestingly, the benefits of nocturnal inhalation have been found to linger into the afternoon following.

To improve mood: Lemon and cinnamon-vanilla are closely associated with a positive mindset. Then again, any scent you personally deem to be pleasant presumably will lift your spirits.

To relax: Options includes lavender, rose, almond, cedar/pine, bergamot, chamomile, marjoram, heliotrope, sandalwood, vanilla, muguet, ylang-ylang and spiced apple. For example, the last has been shown to reduce blood pressure in subjects by three to five points, whereas lavender sedates our central nervous system.

To reduce tension: Lavender and cedar could do the trick.

To reduce anxiety: Orange, vanilla, lime, marjoram, rose, lavender, bergamot, cypress, and floral scents generally.

To feel healthier: The aroma of baby powder, assuming you like babies. (Scent only; never inhale the powder itself).

Some closing notes. First, while it is perfectly normal for people to stop detecting an aroma after a period of time, its cognitive and physiological benefits continue to be felt. Second, you needn't confine efforts toward aromatherapy to your main creative space; consider infusing appropriate scents into secondary areas associated with idea generation, such as bedrooms and baths. To deliver aromas into a room, use scented candles and sticks, liquid solutions poured into open bowls, diffusers, scent jars and machines, or distribute them through air ducts.

RELATED TACTICS

#17. Make music.

Tactics Group III: Action

Tactic #28. Take a shower.

WHAT TO DO

Take a shower or bath.

WHY DO IT?

Because 72% of the 4,000 people polled in a recent global survey said they get new ideas and solve problems while showering. A striking 14% of the study group take showers for the sole purpose of problem-solving, with the highest concentration of these respondents falling in the 18–34 year-old age group.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

It's the most famous shriek in creativity history. The ancient Greek mathematician and inventor Archimedes, suddenly realizing the answer to a thorny problem he'd been grappling with, shouts "Eureka!" and runs naked down the street in excitement before returning to his quarters to work

out the details of his solution.

And what was the great man doing at the precise instant he registered the world's first recorded "Aha" moment?

He was taking a bath.

Archimedes might have been the first to be credited with experiencing a flash of insight while immersed in water, but he certainly wasn't the last. These days, it's become almost axiomatic that we arrive at some of our best ideas in the shower. It's so effective a milieu for idea generation that many highly accomplished people take showers expressly to tease out their inner muse. Fashion designer Tom Ford and poet Maya Angelou do it. So did Benjamin Franklin, John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Victor Hugo, Gustav Flaubert, Einstein, and Steve Jobs. Such clean people they must have been.

Work-at-home comic, writer, filmmaker, actor, and author Woody Allen is another notable aficionado of the power shower. He once described in detail his method for overcoming writer's block:

I'll be at an impasse and what will help me is to take a shower. It breaks up everything and relaxes me.

The shower is particularly good in cold weather. This sounds so silly, but I'll be working dressed as I am and I'll want to get into the shower for a creative stint. So I'll take off some of my clothes and make myself an English muffin or something and try to give myself a little chill so I want to get in the shower. I'll stand there with steaming hot water coming down for thirty minutes, forty-five

minutes, just thinking out ideas and working on plot. Then I get out and dry myself and dress and then flop down on the bed and think there.

So what is it about a good soak or shower that enables us to conjure up creative thoughts not readily discoverable in our normal dressed and dry state?

Many things. For one, we are (usually) alone and cut off from life outside the room. There's relatively little to pull us away from getting into the flow, so to speak. No reports to submit, no lesson plans to write, no canvases to paint. Even our smartphones don't follow us into the stall. With little to do other than lather, rinse, and repeat, we get to enjoy the luxury of a largely stress-free space in which to think and reflect.

Ambient conditions factor as well. Take the white noise produced by the rush of water streaming out of a shower head and cascading to the floor. Remarkably, this sound typically measures out at 70 decibels, exactly the figure put forth in Tactic #16 as ideal for nudging us out of focused attention and into a less directed, more relaxed mode of thought.

Tactics relating to temperature, and specifically, warmth, similarly contribute to the idea-inducing atmosphere. When we're warm we tend to be happy, and when we're happy we're more inclined to assume a creative mindset.

And then there's the automatic nature of the activity. Reflexive, routine, repetitive, uncomplicated, are some of the terms that spring to mind in describing the act of everyday bathing.

That doesn't necessarily make it a bad thing. It makes it a habit.

Habits are mental shortcuts, recurring behavioral sequences seared into our brains

through frequent enactment. Everyone has them. In fact, it could be argued that nature deliberately designed us to be creatures of habit for a good reason: it reduces the amount of mental effort needed to perform recurring tasks. Like showering. Imagine if you had to re-learn how to bathe yourself every morning. You'd never get out the door or into your creative space on time for work or school.

Habitual behavior has another benefit, one with substantial implications for creativity: it frees up the mind to wander where it will.

And wander it does. According to one assessment, our minds stray from whatever we're doing, habitual or otherwise, on average 47% of our waking hours. Specific activities run the gamut. Showering is most favorable to random thoughts, which preoccupy us a whopping 67% of the time we're under the spigot. Walking falls right behind, at around 52%. During exercise it's 40%. The activity least consumed by mind wandering? Sex, coming in at about 10%. Well, I should hope so! But then, one hopes that lovemaking never descends to the level of habit.

Mind wandering enhances problem-solving by simultaneously relaxing activity in the prefrontal cortex, which handles executive functions like decision-making, and by activating a set of circuits within the brain called the Default Mode Network, or DMN. An intriguing aspect of the DMN is that it resides mainly in areas of the brain uninvolved with perceiving or responding to the outside world. Shifting awareness away from external stimuli and objective knowledge allows our minds to expend energy randomly rummaging around the storehouse of memories, images, concepts, and information piled up inside our unconscious. Conditions are ripe for us to discover the sorts of unexpected connections and breakthrough insights that are the fodder of creative thinking.

Two caveats on mind wandering. First, it's a highly potent method for cutting through creative problems already in our mental pipelines, as Woody Allen's account reveals. It's a less effectual method for enhancing creativity in general. Have an agenda when you get in the shower. Then put it on a back burner and grab the soap.

Second, you don't want to mentally stray so far off the reservation that you miss out on your own good ideas. "For creativity you need your mind to wander," says psychologist Jonathan Schooler, "but you also need to be able to notice that you're mind wandering and catch the idea when you have it. If Archimedes had come up with a solution in the bathtub but didn't notice he'd had the idea, what good would it have done him?"

Not much, I'm afraid. Or us. So get yourself a waterproof pencil and some waterproof paper. Yes, waterproof paper. Tactic #30 tells you more about this magic product.

RELATED TACTICS

#16. Make noise.

#22. Adjust the thermostat.

#27. Daydream.

#30. Keep a pencil at the ready.

#32. Grab a hot beverage.

#33. Make a fire. Or look at a picture of one.

#37. Exercise.

#39. Take a walk. Ride a bike. Climb a mountain.

#40. Wash the dishes. Mow the lawn. Vacuum.

#47. Be alone.

Tactic # 31. Dress nicely.

WHAT TO DO

Dress respectfully. Avoid clothes with holes in them, things you wouldn't wear in front of anyone besides friends and family, and states of semi-undress. Adapt attire to the task at hand, including messy work and activities with practical or professional dress requirements (e.g., painting, gardening, veterinary work).

WHY DO IT

Experimental data shows that creative thinking improves when we wear neat attire and task-appropriate clothes.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Once upon a time people got dressed up to do almost anything. Go to work. Go to dinner. Go to a ballgame.

Then dress codes began to weaken. In some quarters they've disappeared altogether. Stroll into the offices of a Google or Uber these days and you're far more likely to find flip-flops, t-shirts, tank tops, shorts, hoodies, and ripped jeans than a tie pin from Brooks Brothers or a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes. Even Zappos, a hugely successful online seller of fashionable shoes and clothing, takes a largely laissez-faire approach to employee dress.

Of course, a few basic rules remain in effect in just about every office, unspoken or otherwise. Nudity is generally frowned upon. And you're not allowed to wear your pajamas.

At home, you can do either.

Which raises a question: does going completely casual help, hinder, or have no effect on home-based creativity?

Many people who work at home believe instinctively that relaxed dress is good for ideation. After all, they reason, feeling at ease facilitates creative productivity, a position I'll be the first to agree with. Besides, if an extraordinarily innovative company like Facebook (founded by a guy who never wears anything to work except a T-shirt) manages to flourish with few sartorial constraints placed on staff, why would anyone striving to be creative in the comfort of their own homes impose a more restrictive policy on themselves?

Here's why: because there's scientific evidence that one size does not fit all when it comes to the relationship between clothes and creativity. In fact, research indicates that you'll gain greater insight into creative problems when you're more dressed up than down.

At the root of the research is the notion that clothing conveys a *social distancing effect*. Social distance is the measure of how close people feel to each other psychologically. Dress has a profound effect on how we gauge that distance. A person decked out in a snappy business suit, tuxedo, or long gown, is liable to be perceived by the casually dressed observer as authoritative, distant, and aloof, whereas the same person in Bermuda shorts and sneakers will be judged approachable and open.

If you're like most people, how you dress will also affect your self-image. Neat or elegant attire lifts you above your normal station and, as many would attest, makes you feel like a different person. Relaxed dress brings opposite results.

That feeling of remoteness from oneself and others, however faint or subconscious, is sufficient to trigger a change in how you see the world. Instead of focusing on detail, which

requires being close to something, your brain is now primed to look at things from a distance. Which is exactly the mental framework you want to assume when solving a creative problem. The farther back you can stand from the problem, the wider your cone of vision and the more potential solutions you can explore. The nearer you are, the narrower and more intense your focus, and the fewer paths to a solution you're likely to discern.

Other tactics derive their effectiveness from feelings of psychological distance too. Some work off of actual distance, (#2, #15), others off perceived distance (#3, #4), and one on the basis of time (#12). All manifest what is known as Construal Level Theory, which I discuss in greater detail in Tactic #12.

A second factor at play with dress is its communicative value, particularly if you're a creative professional. It's harder to generate self-confidence in your abilities and your seriousness as a professional if you dress like you did in high school. Your clothes send a signal to your brain about how you see yourself. Don't confuse your brain with a mixed message.

Differentiating what you wear during creative time from what you wear during non-creative periods also boosts divergent thinking in the same way that designating a creative workspace in the home does. Like Pavlov's dogs, your mind will be conditioned to shift into creative mode when you put on clothes associated with divergent thinking.

Mind you, should you be a clone of Mark Zuckerberg or the reincarnation of Albert Einstein (who hated to wear socks), you can disregard everything that's been said here and wear whatever you darn please. Otherwise, my advice is to dress for creative success by applying these findings to your own circumstances as best you can.

RELATED TACTICS

#2. Work under a high ceiling.

#3. Look at things that are blue or green.

#12. Display mementos.

#15. Take in a vista.

#18. Dim the lights.

#49. Get out of the house.

#50. Really get out of the house.

#