• Paper / Proposal Title:

The Wilderness in the Metropolis: The Weather as a Source of Nature in Urban High-Rise Buildings

• Author(s) Name:

Kevin Nute

• University or Company Affiliation:

University of Hawai‘i, Manoa

• Abstract (300 words):

It is now widely acknowledged that contact with nature has important benefits for us. Most people in the developed world now spend more than 90% of their lives inside buildings, however, and the majority, particularly in large cities, lack direct views of nature. The lockdowns due to the COVID emergency highlighted the psychological toll of spending weeks indoors, and the inadequacy of our existing buildings to keep us in contact with nature under such circumstances.

The most common means of trying to compensate for this missing nature in urban buildings is indoor planting, but these have been found to be significantly less beneficial than contact with wild nature. This appears to be because indoor plants lack two key characteristic of wilderness—perceptible change, and a sense that we are in the presence of something beyond our control.

Even in on the highest floors of high-buildings in the densest of urban environments, however, the Earth’s largest wilderness, its atmosphere, is only the thickness of a pane of
glass away. And this particular wilderness is characterized by perpetual change, more commonly known as the weather.

Based on research by the author and others indicating that the bringing the natural movements of sunlight, wind and rain into indoor environments lowers occupant heartrates and helps them to maintain focus without being distracting, this paper examines the practical implications of bringing these movements into urban high-rise buildings, where contact with nature is typically most lacking. Given the fact that the existing building stock far outnumbers the quantity of new structures being constructed, the paper focusses in particular on the feasibility of achieving this goal using retrofits to existing building facades.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Kevin Nute’s work focuses on transcultural design principles. He is the author of Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan (1993), winner of an International Architecture Monograph Award from the American Institute of Architects; Place, Time and Being in Japanese Architecture (2004), which was supported by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; John Yeon and the Landscape Arts of China and Japan (2010) a University of Oregon sponsored exhibition at the American Institute of Architects in Portland; and most recently Naturally Animated Architecture (2018), which received the 2018 Digital Book World Award for architecture and a 2019 eLit Gold Medal.

Professor Nute received his architectural training at the University of Nottingham before working in practices in London, Hong Kong and Singapore. He earned his doctorate at Cambridge, and has been a visiting Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and a Japan Foundation Research Fellow at the University of Tokyo. From 1996 to 2000 he was an associate professor of architecture at Muroran Institute of Technology, a Japanese national university, taught for almost two decades at the University of Oregon, and joined the University of Hawai’i in 2019.