



HOW TO CREATE A  
SENSE OF NATURE  
IN ARCHITECTURE  
WITH TREE BARK



# How to Create a Sense of Nature in Architecture with Tree Bark

In modern luxury architecture, creating benefits both to the people who inhabit a structure and to the environment is more important than ever. Creating a visual sense of nature in architecture can of course appeal for aesthetic reasons to those developing homes and commercial structures. But to create a deeply felt sense of nature requires more than the appearance of nature. It requires choosing and incorporating products that not only evoke nature through the senses, but demonstrate a commitment to nature by originating in a regenerative process, one that gives back to nature and people.

Incorporating natural tree bark and natural wood wall coverings into both exteriors and interiors is a perfect opportunity to create an authentic sense of nature in architecture. These products represent the nexus of nature and luxury architecture, offering profound benefits to both people and the planet:

1. Distinct and unique beauty
2. Sustainability
3. Contribution to mental and physical health
4. Alignment with environmental values
5. Proven award-winning potential

By considering a few key characteristics of regeneratively sourced bark products, you can truly elevate nature in architecture, allowing your structures to reach new heights in eco-promotion and modern aesthetics.

## 1. Distinct and unique beauty

Products made of bark, a truly incredible natural substance, present an opportunity to quietly invite people to reconnect with nature, whether at home, in the workplace, or elsewhere. This connection taps into biophilia, the instinctive human love of nature; humans are predisposed to find greater meaning and comfort in natural elements.

Fractals and the golden ratio, which are considered pleasing aspects of design, are also known to form the basis of [patterns found in nature](#). Their use in complex architecture reveals an intellectual comprehension of patterns in nature.

Humans' appreciation for these designs speaks to a powerful emotional or innate connection to nature. We're all familiar with the universal appeal of [hygge](#), a Danish aesthetic that incorporates nature in architecture and natural elements indoors. Typically associated with muted tones, the soft aroma of trees, and textures with complex patterns that only nature can produce, hygge-informed design emphasizes the notion that [returning to nature is akin to coming home](#) — and vice versa.

Including nature in architecture is as functional as it is profound with tree bark and wood products because they are already inherently distinct and beautiful.



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## 2. Sustainability



In 2002, architect and author William McDonough captivated people around the world with the simple idea that “designing a building like a tree and a city like a forest” was possible. A core part of achieving this vision is ensuring the sustainable and regenerative value of bark products. To do that, we need to consider the regenerative value of bark products, how the products are made, and also the benefits the whole process creates.

Factories that produce commodities like wood and paper products, chemicals, metals, and refined petroleum use 5% of all freshwater in the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Significant amounts of water are used for:

- Fabricating, processing, washing, diluting, and cooling products
- Transportation
- Incorporating water into a product
- Sanitation needs within the manufacturing facility

Products with the Bark House® brand have been designed following nature's inspiration since the company's inception in 1990. For example, products like Bark House® Poplar Bark Shingles and Wall Coverings go beyond the benefits offered by the component materials of the products, which are 100% natural and pass California Air Quality VOC Standards. And these products also use no water in their manufacture.

In addition, 100% of the electricity used in the manufacturing of Bark House® Poplar Shingles and Wall Coverings comes from renewable solar power, generated at this facility. And 90% of the materials are sourced within 50 miles and 100% within 500 miles, meaning that carbon

emissions from transportation are also curbed. Finally, Bark House manufacturing methods are clean and rely heavily on fine hand-crafting.

Using regeneratively created tree and bark products certainly puts nature in architecture, but just as important, it connects architecture, and everyone involved in it, directly to nature. You can rest easy knowing that all products demonstrate qualitatively and quantitatively that [a factory can be like a forest](#). Air, water, and soil are improved in the local life-shed that's impacted by company manufacturing processes. Like a forest, Bark House enhances more than its place of origin. Its products truly connect the local community and worldwide clients to nature.

### 3. Contribution to mental and physical health



Humans' instinctive connection to nature is behind a growing design movement in workplaces with the [objective of helping employees stay healthier and more productive](#), especially in an age when stress has been noted by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) as one of the 21st century's biggest detriments to human health.

Nature in architecture strengthens deep connections to the outdoors and, thus, relaxation. For one thing, bringing natural elements indoors insulates us from outside distractions and the rhythms of the human world, aligning focus to the present moment and providing a healing effect through simple delights.

The [scientifically proven ways in which biophilic design promotes health](#) include:

1. Reduced stress levels. Even if you can't be outside, [simply looking at nature can reduce stress and promote health](#).
2. Less pain. Connecting with nature can [decrease pain and improve healing](#). In a [study conducted by Dr. Robert Ulrich](#) in the 1970s and `80s, surgical patients assigned to rooms with windows looking out on a natural scene had shorter hospital stays, had fewer negative evaluative comments in nurses' notes, and took fewer potent analgesics than patients with windows facing a brick building wall.
3. Feeling more connected. Nature is [scientifically proven to encourage connection](#) with each other and the larger world. For example, in a University of Illinois study, residents in Chicago public housing surrounded by green space reported stronger feelings of connection with and belonging in the local community than tenants in buildings without trees.
4. Improved cognitive performance. Mitigating stress isn't just about taking breaks, which may or may not work. What's key is the type of break taken, with [research showing that immersion in nature boosts performance on tasks requiring sustained focus](#).
5. Fuel for the soul. [Research at the University of Rochester](#) reveals that nature makes people feel more alive.

While not the same as being outdoors, being surrounded by or at least exposed to natural bark and wood products via architectural and design elements provides an immediate connection to nature. One commercial space in which this is aptly demonstrated is the [University of Chicago Child Development Center](#), which uses textured bark siding specifically to engage children with nature in architecture and materials they can interact with through touch. [Google offices around the world](#) are known for their creative and nature-inspired interiors incorporating bark that are not just fun to be in but promote relaxation and healthy alternatives to traditional desk setups.

Finally, private residences as well can bring the outdoors in by incorporating forest elements of the local environment in the interior design, just as tree bark was used in this [North Michigan private residence](#).

## 4. Alignment with environmental values



The prioritization of incorporating nature in architecture signals to clients that an architectural and design firm is aligned with their environmental values. The use of natural wood and bark products in exterior and interior elements is a prominent demonstration of those values.

In the modern mindset, it's as [important for luxury brands to share one's personal values](#), especially those of sustainability and social consciousness, as it is to share one's aesthetic tastes.

More and more, companies are expected to provide solutions to environmental and social issues, with end users now readily avoiding companies with adverse reputations. That places the onus on architects and designers to pay attention to providing healthy returns on client investments. Luxury architects and interior designers who boost their commitment to the environment can also simultaneously enhance their business.

In luxury architecture, there is a growing emphasis on the evolution from sustainable to regenerative thinking when it comes to nature in architecture. The goal must be for new creations to not just reduce damage, but be more beneficial to nature. This progression is

especially important with architectural design since creations both exist within and create an internal environment. People want to live in homes and work in offices where they can feel comfortable knowing that their lifestyle and the products contained within do not cause harm to nature.

Designers and architects can ensure they're embracing a regenerative mindset by understanding the unique socio-ecological context of the work, rather than applying generic, one-size-fits-all solutions to challenges. Questions to consider when evaluating a project approach include:

- **Are materials sourced in an environmentally beneficial way?** For example, Bark House bark products do not require additional trees to be cut down. Instead, materials are harvested from wood waste. We take steps to ensure a healthier forest source of materials.
- **Does the production process protect the local environment?** Bark House not only uses no water in direct manufacturing its bark products, it also contributes its income from bark products toward initiatives that protect the Southern Appalachian watersheds, which provide water to 10 million people.
- **How can you feed new life, health, and wealth into the myriad ecological and social systems a home design project or product touches?** Bark House provides free training for its vendors in the ethical procurement of Reclaimed Appalachian Wood Waste (RAW) and regenerative practices. This encourages vendors to not only actively engage in regenerative processes themselves but also share with others in turn.

Luxury is not built on an image of excess anymore. Sustainable interior design brands have a responsibility to the consumer to advocate a healthier world in which regenerative attitudes and products are considered desirable.



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## 5. Proven award-winning potential



While incorporating nature in architecture has its own rewards, there's nothing like being recognized for your architectural and design accomplishments. With their aesthetic, practical, and environmental benefits, natural bark and wood products are a wise decision for those looking to create award-winning projects.

Here are just a few of the awards earned by projects that have incorporated bark as a way of creating a sense of nature in architecture (many of these have won multiple awards):

- University of Chicago Child Development Center — [U.S. Green Building Council Emerald Award](#)
- Parson's The New School For Design — [National AIA Honor Award](#)
- Spruce Pine Main Street Central Park — [Main Street State Conference Design Award, North Carolina Department of Commerce](#)
- Berkeley Residence — [AIA Berkeley Green Design](#)
- Sherber and Rad Skincare Boutique — [AIA Virginia / Washington DC Award of Merit in Commercial Interiors](#)
- Washington, DC, Residence — [AIA Maryland Excellence in Design Awards](#)

Bark House's regenerative harvesting and manufacturing processes have earned it top honors, including the world's first Platinum Cradle to Cradle® Certification. Bark wall coverings were awarded Architectural Record Product of the Year and were a John Ruskin Prize finalist. The business has been recognized by the Carol Sanford Institute as a Regenerative Company, by the Buckminster Fuller Institute as a Catalyst Company, as a B Corp Best For The World Company, and has earned important state and regional sustainability awards.

Bark House began the work to demonstrate the real benefits of the Bark House® products and its process as an advanced system commitment with third-party verification of inputs. Today, the business monitors the benefits that its products and processes create for worldwide clients and local families alike.

## Tree Bark: The Nexus of Nature and Modern Architecture

Imbuing your projects with a sense of the natural world is an opportunity to create stunning designs while quietly improving clients' lives and supporting the environment. But distinctive, award-winning designs require more than biomimicry.

Bark elevates nature-inspired architecture by infusing the very walls with a material that is

- **Regenerative**, the next iteration of sustainable design
- **Truly one-of-a-kind** rather than biomimetic
- **Contemporary while imaginatively forward-thinking**

In a world awakening to the economic and environmental costs of waste, where renewable energy is slowly replacing processes and habitats that have made us sick, the simplest natural materials are an opportunity to quietly invite reconnection and reflection.

Incorporating nature through bark products is exponentially beneficial for the architect, the client, and the public. From its circular economy to its distinctive aesthetic appeal, tree bark is a perfect model for the nexus of nature and modern architecture.



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Designers, architects, builders, manufacturers, and customers all have a role to play in creating stunning environments that support the life-enhancing qualities of ecosystems and are grounded in regenerative design. If you're inspired by the examples above and want to use natural wood wall treatments and products that are 100% sourced and made in the USA with renewable energy, [contact Bark House](#).