



How to be more JOYFUL

Forget mindfulness – yes, really! By making some tweaks to your surroundings, you can create a happier, healthier life

Joy. That delicious feeling of pure pleasure that lifts us out of the humdrum of daily life. If only we could have a little more of that. If only it wasn't so fleeting, so unpredictable. What if we could wave a magic wand and tap into that exuberant vitality whenever we fancied?

According to Ingrid Fetell Lee, author of a brilliant new book, *Joyful*, that's exactly what we can do. We don't

need to wait for joy to bubble up from within. Nor do we need to spend years cultivating a particular technique for inner happiness. Instead, we can design our lives to be more joyful.

After a year canvassing colleagues, friends and people on the street in 16 different countries, Fetell Lee discovered certain aesthetics are *guaranteed* to lift the spirits. So here's how to make your environment more delightful...

1 LIGHT UP YOUR LIFE

There's good reason we want to head to sunnier climes for our holidays or seek out light-filled rooms. Light is colour's energy supply – and it also creates joy in its own right. The impact of light on energy, health and happiness is huge. Employees who sit by windows are more productive and active, both in and outside the office.

Children in sunnier classrooms learn more. Hospital patients assigned sunnier rooms recover faster and require less pain medication. This is not new knowledge – as long ago as the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale noted that her injured patients always lay facing the window. "Like moths, we can't resist light," says Fetell Lee.

+ DO IT! If you want a brighter, more energised space, experts agree that you should lighten the biggest surface: walls, floors, work surfaces. And buy "warm" light bulbs with a colour rendering index (CRI) close to 100 to keep your spaces looking bright; the new fluorescents create a cold, unflattering light.

2 PLAY!

The most joyful people manage to make time for play even as adults, whether that's through sport, a weekend dancing at a festival, or an hour set aside to dabble in watercolours. Fetell Lee believes we can reconnect with this childlike joy by incorporating more playful round shapes into our lives.

Think about it: circles and spheres are the aesthetic of childhood, from hula-hoops and spinning tops to paddling pools, bubbles and balloons. Circular objects trigger our playful impulses, while angular objects have the opposite effect. A circular or elliptical coffee table can change a space to encourage lively conversations and spontaneous games.

"You're not going to break out into a spontaneous happy dance in a living room where you risk splitting your shin on an angular coffee table," notes Fetell Lee.

+ DO IT! Add circular shapes to your home or workspace. Pom-poms on the trim of cushions make them irresistibly playful. Look for spherical lights or circular mirrors. If rectangles work best in the space, choose a design with curved corners.

3 SEEK NATURE

Access to nature has been shown to improve the quality of our sleep, decrease blood pressure and even increase lifespan. According to one study, housing estates surrounded by nature have a 50% lower crime rate. A similar effect is found in prisons, where watching nature videos resulted in 26% fewer violent incidents. While the practice of "tree bathing" – simply relaxing among trees – has been shown in several studies to increase the activity of natural killer (NK) cells, a type of white blood cell needed to boost immunity and the body's defence against cancer.

+ DO IT! Create a live "installation" of plants in your home. Easier still, buy a large landscape photograph or choose leafy wallpapers or fabrics. Another way to bring the outside in is through sound – by playing the sound of crickets or the sea in the background, for instance. It has been proven that recordings of natural sounds can calm children and ease pain.

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4 PAINT ME A RAINBOW

"We have a deep-seated desire for colour," says Fetell Lee. One study found that people who looked at a colourful environment were more confident, alert and joyful. "Colour signifies life. From the moment I started studying joy it was clear that the liveliest places all have one thing in common: bright, vivid colour."

Fetell Lee cites the city of Tirana in Albania, where the mayor – an artist by training – became famous for restoring morale to the city in 2000 by painting a grey building in the city centre a bright shade of tangerine. The orange building was joined by other brightly coloured buildings... "And strange things started to happen – people stopped littering and claimed they felt safer. They started gathering in cafés again." Nothing had changed except the surface and yet it worked. "It was as if the city had been revitalised by the sheer power of joy."

+ DO IT! There's no need to paint your whole house tangerine, but the odd pop of colour will revitalise your home or wardrobe. Buy a bright throw for your sofa or paint the inside of your cupboards a vibrant hue. Brighten up your wardrobe by investing in colourful lingerie. Your underwear drawer is the first one you open in the morning, so why not fill it with a bright rainbow of colours to make you smile?

5 CREATE HARMONY

Symmetry and balance are pleasing to the eye, says Fetell Lee, which is why we find uncluttered environments so soothing. She calls this the joy of order. Simply arranging objects into geometrical configurations is enough to transform them into a source of delight. Clutter, on the other hand, creates asymmetry and discord. What's more, according to Gestalt psychology, our brains use this method of like-goes-with-like to simplify the world and make it easier to process. Repeating colours, textures and shapes helps our eye see a room as a whole, rather than as a mishmash of disconnected things. Living in symmetry and balance changes our mood and behaviour for the better.

+ DO IT! Declutter and order your cupboards. Find a common element and group objects accordingly, say by colour or size. Perhaps buy matching hangers for your wardrobe, or display your collections of prints in identical frames. For inspiration, check out the blog *Things Organized Neatly* (thingsorganizedneatly.tumblr.com).

YOUR JOY TOOLKIT

- + Keep a joy journal** and use it to note whenever you feel joy. When you smile, or laugh, who are you with? What are you doing? What sights, sounds or textures trigger joy in you?
- + Repeat the exercise**, this time noting your killjoys. Which people, places and things sap your energy?
- + Start a joy project.** It might be a room overhaul, say redesigning your bedroom, or planning an occasion like a dinner party. Pick three aesthetics from your joy list to implement.
- + Remember**, by putting joy into the world, you are expressing the hope that tomorrow can be even better than today. *Joyful* by Ingrid Fetell Lee (Little, Brown Spark) is out now. **w&h**



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OUR EXPERT

INGRID FETELL LEE is the author of *Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness* (Little, Brown Spark). A designer by profession, Fetell Lee was surprised when someone commented that her creations were joyful. "We've been taught to think that joy comes from within. But what if we could create that feeling through the things that surround us?"