

ARE THE GREAT OUTDOORS THE NEXT GREAT OFFICE DESIGN?

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE POSITIVE IMPACTS
OF OUTDOOR WORK AND MEETING SPACES



ghent.

The Science Behind the Positive Impacts of Outdoor Work and Meeting Spaces

Americans spend an average of [1,791 hours at work over the course of the year](#). Roughly 20 percent of an office worker's time is spent cooped up in a building, subjected to the artificial, off-white glow of fluorescent lighting, the faint and monotonous hum of a white-noise system, and the stale, recycled air that permeates the space. While modern architects and designers have done wonders in revamping interior spaces to make them more attractive and comfortable, one thing remains certain:

There is an increasing desire for outdoor work and meeting spaces.

Outdoor spaces specifically designed for meetings and temporary work engagements are relatively new building amenities. They are backed by research and have been shown to greatly improve the health, wellbeing, productivity, and overall experience of workers. Because the ability to get outside during the workday has remarkable effects on people, they are also desired by workers, businesses, and building owners.

Why Are Outdoor Workspaces So Appealing to Employees?

There's a reason why parks exist in even the densest cities, why golf courses are usual places to hold business meetings, and why biophilic design—natural lighting, plants and greenery, and natural landscape features—has seeped into modern building architecture.

The biophilia hypothesis—that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life—is the sole reason why many modern offices are looking to bring the outdoors in, and the indoors, out. People innately want to feel connected with nature. It boosts our mood, reduces stress, and encourages creativity. All things that are useful to the productivity and retention of modern employees.



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

The UN Targets Access to Green Spaces for All People

The United Nations (UN) is pushing for global access to green spaces for all people. Their [Urban Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) include [SDG 11.7](#), which seeks to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces by 2030.

Access to fresh air and outdoor spaces greatly improves people's experience at work because it taps into our inherent need to be outside. [Two-thirds of American adults](#) say they spend their free time in nature at least once or twice a month. This includes nearly half of all adults who say they do so at least once a week.

What stops most people from spending more time outdoors? [Survey respondents say](#) it's their work. When thinking about what employees want, it turns out that adding outdoor amenities like balconies, patios, and other meeting and workspaces can have a significant impact on employee satisfaction, attraction, and retention.

Outdoor Workspaces Provide an Opportunity for Building Owners

Outdoor spaces can be a great investment for building owners, making their office spaces more appealing for business tenants and their employees. Since the rollout of the [ANSI/BOMA Z65.1-2017 standard](#), building owners are looking to architects and designers to incorporate outdoor spaces into new and existing architectural plans, hoping to attract modern businesses into these spaces, something that is becoming harder to do as more businesses opt for remote work.

People are happier when they can get outside, and businesses are quickly moving to provide these types of work and meeting spaces for their employees. Of all the updates in the new BOMA standards, the addition of outdoor spaces has had the greatest impact on area metrics for buildings. [Gensler has reported](#) increases of up to 10% (and above) in the total rentable areas of buildings when new outdoor spaces are constructed, allowing owners to achieve higher dollar amounts based on rentable areas in the building.

The challenge of how to incorporate these types of spaces into new and existing building designs remains, but the benefits for both businesses and building owners are already well documented.



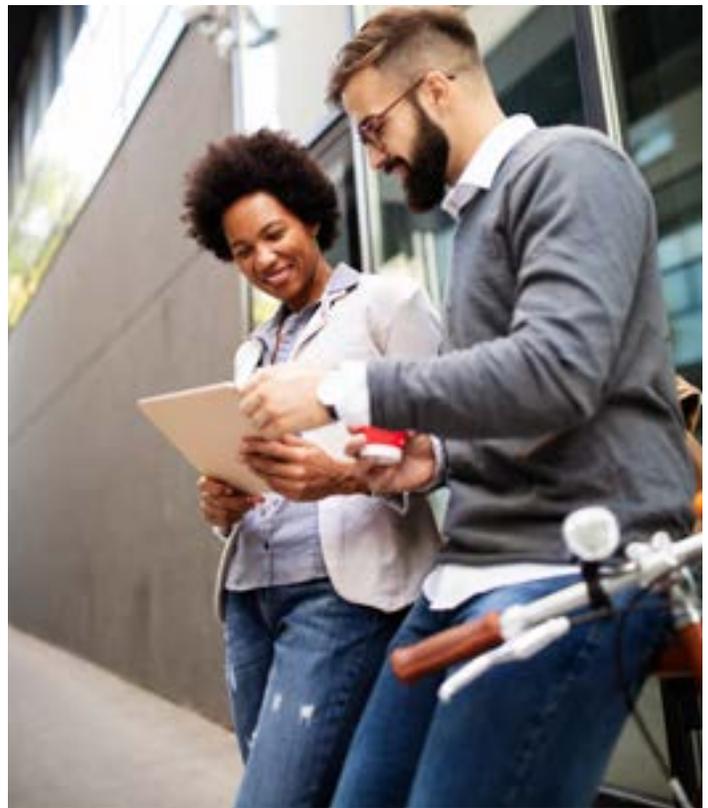
Gensler has reported increases of up to 10% in the total rentable areas of buildings when new outdoor spaces are constructed



BOMA Guidelines for Outdoor Office Spaces

Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) guidelines include standards for outdoor office spaces. Building owners and managers are allowed to use outdoor spaces as usable square footage, which can then be incorporated into leases and pricing.

Of all the updates in the new BOMA standards, the addition of outdoor spaces has had the greatest impact on area metrics for buildings.



Why Businesses are Seeking Buildings with Outdoor Workspaces

Outdoor Spaces Improve Employee Attraction and Retention

One of the great challenges businesses face is employee retention. It's expensive to replace an employee, [costing approximately one-half to two times their annual salary](#), and businesses are confronted with increasing numbers of employees fleeing their current positions for other opportunities. The Great Resignation resulted in [47.8 million people leaving their jobs in 2021](#), a 26.8 percent increase over the number of employees who quit in 2017.

This pace has not slowed, and the new generation of workers (Generation Z) are significantly more likely to job hop for new opportunities. Some [surveys reveal as many as 65 percent of Gen Z employees](#) plan on staying at their current jobs for less than a year.

Buildings with Outdoor Spaces Give Employees the Freedom to Choose Where and How They Work

Remote and hybrid work have long been commonplace in many businesses, but they have significantly risen in popularity over the years. Businesses are now facing challenges with employees requesting remote work. Employees who are in the office full-time are seeking more flexible workplace environments. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a desire for social distancing in the workplace, something that outdoor spaces provide better than anything else. These spaces provide an easier pathway for businesses to ease the “return to work hesitation” felt by many employees who have been working remotely over the last several years.

[Gensler's 2019 U.S. Workplace Survey](#) supports the notion that employees want to choose how and where they work. The survey found that people who work away from their desks are more effective and have a better workplace experience, with 79 percent of people who have a variety of settings at their workplace and 71 percent of people who have a choice in workspaces reporting a “great workplace experience.”



Workplace Amenities that Impact Employee Effectiveness and Experience (From Greatest to Least Value)

Gensler U.S. Workplace Survey, 2019:

1. Innovation Hubs
2. Maker Spaces
3. Quiet/Tech-Free Zones
- 4. Outdoor Workspaces**
5. Focus Rooms
6. Work Cafés
7. Phone Rooms
8. Libraries
9. Cafeterias
10. Break Rooms/Lounges

Outdoor workspaces were among the most influential work-focused amenities that support a person's ability to choose their workstation. These spaces offer the flexibility modern employees need. Whether they are using the space as an eating area, an impromptu meeting place, or a temporary workspace, outdoor spaces can have a large impact on the employee experience, health, and performance.

Why Businesses are Seeking Buildings with Outdoor Workspaces

Outdoor Spaces Improve Health and Wellness

Why invest in outdoor spaces to keep employees happy and healthy?

There's a clear link between employee retention and wellness, making it incumbent upon businesses to provide a work environment and office space that maximizes physical and mental wellbeing.

In 2021, [Gallup asked employees what they look for most in an employer](#). The survey found that employees of all generations rank "the organization cares about employees' wellbeing" in their top three responses. Generation Z ranked it their number one desire in a workplace. A [Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis \(CBRE\) report](#) also revealed that 80 percent of employees say a company's wellness offering plays a crucial role in recruiting and retaining them.

Outdoor investments naturally pay for themselves. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that [productivity losses linked to absenteeism cost employers \\$225.8 billion annually](#) in the United States. Providing and encouraging the use of outdoor work and meeting spaces can indirectly increase profitability by reducing employee absenteeism and staff turnover.

Nature is the Key to a Happy and Healthy Workplace

Simply being outside throughout the workday is enough to boost the happiness and health of employees. Studies have shown that [those who spent ≥120 mins in nature](#) had consistently higher levels of both health and well-being than those who reported no exposure. These findings were consistent across most age groups and showed no variance based on how long the exposure was achieved (e.g., one long outdoor session vs. several shorter sessions per week).

Being outside and experiencing nature has been shown to improve:

- [Positive emotions](#) (awe, happiness, joy, etc.)
- [Mental health](#)
- [Prosocial behavior](#) (how people behave toward others)
- [Stress levels](#)

Being outside and experiencing nature has been shown to improve (continued):

- [Heart rates](#)
- [Mood](#)
- [Anxiety](#)
- [Diastolic blood pressure](#)
- [Risk of preterm births](#)
- [Type II diabetes](#)
- [Risks associated with stroke, hypertension, dyslipidemia, asthma, and coronary heart disease](#)

Outdoor Spaces Improve Focus, Productivity, and Performance

Stepping away from the desk and getting outside may take time away from work, but it ultimately increases productivity and performance while minimizing costly mistakes. These "green microbreaks" are a critical counterpoint to the "always-on" workplace culture, and studies have demonstrated their many beneficial effects for both employees and businesses.

The methodologies used in these studies range from simple exposure to nature to longer outdoor interactions. While the methods vary, the results all point to the same conclusion: being outside is good for business.



Attention Restoration Theory (ART) suggests the ability to concentrate may be restored by exposure to natural environments, a theory that is widely cited in academia.

Why Businesses are Seeking Buildings with Outdoor Workspaces

Five Studies Demonstrate the Benefits of Nature on Workplace Performance

In the simplest experiment, researchers placed plants in an office setting, which resulted in [participants being 15 percent more productive](#) than those in workspaces without exposure to greenery.

In a slightly longer study, [participants who viewed images of a green roof for 40 seconds](#) experienced boosts to sub-cortical arousal and cortical attention control. This led to an increase in concentration of 6 percent, compared to an 8 percent drop in concentration for those who viewed a simple concrete roof. The increase in concentration ultimately resulted in lower omission errors and a greater consistency in responding to tasks.

Longer exposures to nature resulted in even greater benefits, [with research across three different studies](#) revealing that 15 minutes walking in a natural setting could improve:



Attention capacity



Positive emotions



The ability to reflect on problems

[Research conducted at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor](#) showed that memory performance and attention spans improved by 20 percent after participants spent an hour interacting with nature, regardless of the temperature. Even those who walked in the park during winter months say improvements in short-term memory and attention.



What About Offices in Cold Climates?

Outdoor spaces may seem like a challenge in areas where winters are long and brutal, as they cannot be used during certain parts of the year, but the benefits of being outdoors exist even in cold climates.

Outdoor meeting spaces remain popular even in cold climates, regardless of the season. People who live in these areas understand the value of going outside during the spring and summer months. They enjoy the nice weather and take every opportunity to be outdoors when they can. Having outdoor meeting spaces and places to work is something to be celebrated, regardless of location.

Why Businesses are Seeking Buildings with Outdoor Workspaces

In the longest study, [researchers took hikers on a four-day backpacking trip](#). When they returned, the group showed a remarkable ability to solve significantly complex puzzles that required creativity when compared to a control group of people waiting to take the same hike. The group that returned from the hike had massive increases in problem-solving (by a full 50%), demonstrating the significant cognitive and creative advantages people have when they are exposure to nature.



Outdoor Spaces Also Benefit Students

A [Report from the National Summit on School Design](#), convened by the American Architectural Foundation, listed “outdoor environments for educational activities and experiences” as one of the six key school design principles of the 21st Century for well-designed schools.

Outdoor spaces are highly beneficial for students. A [study that focused on 255 sixth-grade students](#) from four elementary schools showed that those who attended outdoor educational programs showed significantly higher gains in cooperation and conflict resolution skills, had larger gains in self-esteem and motivation to learn, and significantly improved their science scores by 27 percent.



Finding the Right Meeting and Workspaces for Outdoor Collaboration

It’s not uncommon for employees to stare out the window. Perhaps they’re just following the 20-20-20 Rule—for every 20 minutes spent looking at a screen, you take a break by looking at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds—or they’re looking for something more from their workplace experience. Science has revealed that getting outside, even for a few minutes, has incredible benefits for workers. Imagine what can happen when businesses provide spaces that cultivate outdoor work and collaboration.

As with any new idea, it’s the execution that determines its success. There’s an opportunity for building and business owners to transform their outdoor spaces into convenient, comfortable, and collaborative work environments.

Ghent Preserve

The Outdoor Collaboration Unit that Allows Businesses to Think Outside Its Walls

Preserve is a permanent outdoor architecture unit that creates a meeting space not confined by the four walls of office buildings. These high-quality outdoor systems transform underutilized outdoor spaces into safe and comfortable work and meeting spaces that allow people to connect and collaborate.

Configurable as single or multiple units, these customizable products allow buildings to maximize the effectiveness of their footprint by creating a “fourth space” outdoors. From short, impromptu, and casual meetups to longer

coordinated meetings, Preserve creates an on-site corporate retreat that is both desired and needed by the modern workforce.

Listed as one of the [top five products for office according to Mortarr](#), Preserve was unveiled at NeoCon 2022, making a statement in Ghent’s expanded presence in theMart.



Made of recycled plastic, composite decking slats are eco friendly. Individual slats can be replaced reducing the amount of materials and resources consumed.



Fabric awnings from Sunbrella® are water-resistant and UV-rated. The angle of the awnings sit at 15 degrees which is optimal for providing shade during work hours.



Double-layered tempered safety glass with an EVA interlayer creates a thick, durable writing surface



The structural steel frame is made to withstand harsh weather conditions. Preserve holds PE stamp approvals for various states.

About Ghent

For more than 40 years, we've been crafting and serving our customers' needs with innovative and customizable products, exceptional customer service, and on-time, hassle-free delivery. As a premium supplier of visual communication tools, Ghent is your one-stop shop for blended solutions to enhance your office, conference room, workspace, or classroom.

Quality: with over 95 percent of our products made in the USA, we know what quality looks like. Our products feature durable materials and surfaces that are resistant to scratches, stains, ghosting, and wear. We outlast the competition and back our products with up to 50-year warranties.

Customization: every whiteboard, glassboard and bulletin board that leaves our dock is made to order by men and women who understand the importance of quality craftsmanship. We feature near endless customization options that include size, shape, color, materials, fonts, images, and so much more.

Easy to Use and Clean: our products are manufactured to make writing on them a breeze. They are also easily cleaned and disinfected. Surfaces and materials are specifically chosen to adhere to BIFMA's guidelines for performance as it relates to typical cleaners, disinfectants, and methods for cleaning and maintenance.

Secure Shipping: we ship our products on time and guarantee that they arrive damage free. We have taken the time to master all the complexities that go into shipping and have developed custom packaging specifically molded to protect our products, which is why we have the lowest damage rates in the industry.

Incredible Customer Service: as a team of passionate and qualified individuals, we work to follow through on our promises, from marketing and customer service to production and shipping. We are confident that you will find the perfect visual communication tool that is perfectly customized to meet your needs.

From our people to your people, you can count on us.



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CALL: (800) 543-0550

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