The *Feel Good* Home

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A Practical Guide to Conscious Living

PRESTEL
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Curtain up FOR YOUR HOME STAGE

'Emotions need space.' More and more people are taking this motto literally and setting up their personal retreat for their inner balance at home. We create spaces that are good for us, whether it's a music room, a mini library, a wellness bath or another kind of relaxation area. A safe haven where we can enjoy what is important to us is something that all age groups aspire to, including boomers, Gen X, Gen Z and Millennials. A feel-good home is our chosen 'place to be', especially at a time that does not seem very secure.

The topic of 'feeling good at home' is not just about beautiful furniture, atmospheric interior design and matching colours, however; above all it's about a perfect mixture of different factors that directly influence our wellbeing. It's crucial that all our senses are stimulated. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling – these are the classic five human senses, and together they serve as a base for our overall perception with which we experience impressions and stimuli from the environment, including everything within our four walls.

I hope that this book will help you to create your own 'feel-good home' – including everything that goes with it. You might just start by making yourself a cup of tea, listening to my playlist (see page 124) and relaxing as you read and flip through.

Live yourself happy!

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We perceive our home with our five senses.

Contents


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Senses

Waking up to the twittering of the birds, squinting into the early-morning sunlight, feeling the softness of our blanket – our five senses are in action from the second we wake to the moment we fall asleep.

Living creatures are dependent on their senses to get their bearings in the world, to distinguish friend from foe, to feed themselves and to survive. While some animals have additional, unusual super-senses, such as the ability to detect the Earth's magnetic field, human beings are limited to the classic five senses: hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell. Whether our nostrils are experiencing a new fragrance or our fingers are tickling a cat's fur, the process from original stimulus to the body's reaction is generally very similar for all the senses.

If a specific stimulus, such as a sudden noise or a new taste, hits the respective sensory organ, it is recorded by countless sensory cells and transmitted straight to the brain via nerve cells and pathways. The brain processes the stimulus, which then triggers a corresponding reaction.

Seeing

Keep your eyes open! It's not just in road-traffic situations that sight is of fundamental importance. The eyes will ideally detect hazards and obstacles in advance to allow the body to react accordingly. Yet the optic nerve also records other essential information. Is it a bright day or starry night? Is the mountain far away in the distance or does the incline start within a few metres? Where is the child playing in the garden and where has the dog managed to run off to? Our eyes also signal positive moments, however. The person we're talking to is smiling warmly at us. The sun is glinting magically through the treetops, and, thank goodness, the dog has found its way back on its own. Our sense of sight is the source of most of the information that all the senses ultimately send to the brain.

This is how it works: the cornea, which is basically the window of the eye, lets light rays in. The light falls through the pupil, which dilates or contracts, thereby determining the amount of light allowed in. The light is then focused by the lens and transmitted to the retina. As is also the case with cameras, the image received is upside down. It is the brain that rotates it 180 degrees to its correct position. There are around 130 million photoreceptor cells on the retina. The smaller proportion of these cells, the cones, is responsible for seeing colour. The rods make up the far greater proportion. They detect light and dark contrast. The cones are also responsible for sharp vision. As they are used less at twilight, the outlines and contours of what we're looking at become blurred. The less light there is, the more the rods have to work alone. At night, they are therefore totally on their own.

There are three different groups of cones, each of which perceive a specific colour gamut, namely red, blue and green. The brain pieces the information together, combines it with the information it has received about brightness, and consequently produces a coloured image. Having a defective cone results in colour blindness, such as red-green colour blindness.

All cats are grey at night – because colours only become visible when light comes into play. White light is made up of the so-called 'spectral colours' (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) which we also see in rainbows. The world shines in full colour because every object and every living creature reflects some light rays, while absorbing some other light rays. Green plants, for example, absorb a lot of the red component of sunlight and primarily reflect the green component. The material that an object is composed of therefore determines which light rays are reflected and which are absorbed.

Left *Make sure you surround yourself only with colours, patterns and pictures in your home that you particularly enjoy looking at.*
Below left *Mirrors at home not only reflect the scrutinising check of your hairstyle, but also the light, to give a feeling of space.*
Below right *Stacks of inspirations.*

BLINK OF AN EYE

Are your eyes blue or brown, green or grey? The colour of your eyes is determined by the amount of melanin in the front layer of your eyes' irises. This creates the different colours. How much melanin exists in your own irises is primarily a question of heredity.

Right *Of course, your speakers don't have to play music. There are also podcasts on every topic and for every taste.*
Below left *The infamous dripping water tap can certainly drive you round the bend.*
Below right *If you don't wish to annoy your neighbours or housemates, wear headphones when the music gets louder.*

EAVESDROPPING

Noises are soundwaves. Hertz (Hz) is the unit that indicates vibrations per second. Humans perceive sound waves in a frequency range between 16 and 20,000 Hz; dogs can hear anything between 15 and 50,000 Hz; and bats discern noises between 20 and over 100,000 Hz.

Hearing

Pssst . . . did you hear that? Some sounds are so quiet you can hardly perceive them, like the proverbial pin dropping. Others, meanwhile, have us quickly block our ears. Incidentally, one of the loudest noises of all time was considered to be the bang that occurred when the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa erupted in 1883. Some noises make our hair stand on end, like the grating of a fork scraping against a smooth plate. Other sounds are wonderfully calming, such as the sound of the ocean's waves. Others again are so extraordinarily beautiful and moving that they bring tears to our eyes.

Our ears work 24/7. They're even in use while we're asleep, to alert us to potential dangers or alarms. In ancient times, this might have been something like the cracking of a tree branch which betrayed an approaching enemy or hungry predators. Today, it is more likely that we are disturbed by the noise of cars, lorries or planes.

The outer ear captures the sound waves – which are essentially fluctuating air pressure – like a funnel, before they make their way to the eardrum via the ear canal. They make the eardrum vibrate, and these vibrations are in turn sent from the ossicle to the cochlea, from where the signals are then transmitted straight to the brain.

In humans, the sense of hearing is more sensitive than the other four senses. The ear can detect up to 400,000 sounds, and can distinguish between ten entire octaves. Since we have two ears, it is no problem for our sense of hearing to pinpoint the direction the noises are coming from – a skill that is very helpful in more than just road-traffic scenarios.

Too much noise is unhealthy, which is why people working with loud machinery not only wear earmuffs, but are also required to take noise breaks. Even at home, we are often exposed to stressful noises. Incidentally, a constant noise, like that of a dripping tap, is often considered to cause more stress than the ever-changing banging and crashing from a construction site right outside our window – or a crying baby, an endless telephone chat or loud arguments in the next-door neighbour's house.

We should ensure calm surroundings at home wherever possible. After all, our hectic everyday lives are often loud and stressful enough. It is particularly important to create a tranquil zone in the bedroom to help you switch off and recharge in silence. Soundproof windows and insulating materials that absorb other noises, such as special wall panels, also help to maximise a sense of tranquillity in the home.

Feeling

Oh, how nice! Hugging the people you love, stroking a pet or just wrapping yourself in a cosy blanket – cuddling is just plain good for us. Touch is fundamentally important, particularly for the mind. Babies depend on physical contact for their healthy development, because the touch of the skin stimulates growth hormones and forms new connections in the brain. Yet the skin isn't just about soft, loving touches. It sounds out surfaces for important information. Is the tree trunk rough or smooth? Does the loudspeaker vibrate? Is the coffee cup hot or has it cooled? The skin explores all materials and surfaces, transmitting information about temperature, surface texture, pressure and solidity to the brain.

The skin is the largest sensory organ – it is indeed the largest organ in the human body. It holds the body together and surrounds it as a protective layer. It prevents the body from drying out and influences its temperature by producing sweat. On top of all that, it explores its surroundings and provides potentially life-saving information.

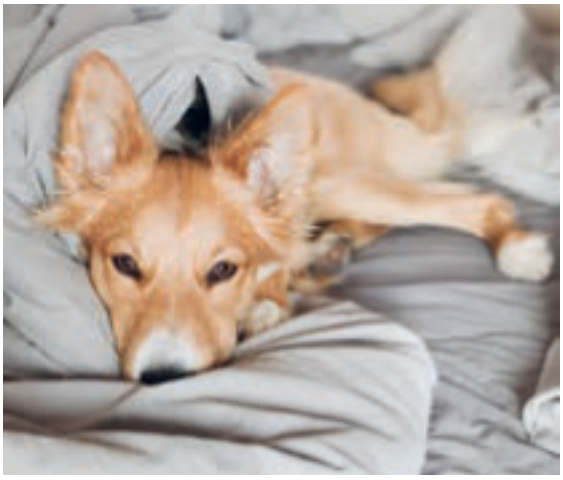
The skin is around one to two millimetres thick and consists of three layers. The topmost layer is the epidermis, beneath which is the dermis, which contains sweat glands and hair roots. The bottommost layer is called the subcutis, also known as the hypodermis, which contains fat cells, as well as blood vessels and nerves.

All three skin layers have receptors – sensory cells that detect external stimuli. But they're not all alike. Some receptors sit directly on the surface and can sense even the faintest of touches, while others sit deeper and react to things like pressure, pain, temperature, vibration . . . the countless different receptors in the skin provide information on whatever they touch.

Just as our skin doesn't feel the same in every part of the body, it similarly does not contain the same amount of sensory cells all over. The lips, for example, are particularly sensitive and can detect the slightest touch, whereas the back is normally not as responsive.

As human beings are the only living creatures to use their hands only to grip and hold things, our fingertips also contain a particularly large amount of sensory cells. After all, our hands are almost always in use and need to continuously send information to the brain. It's not just when reading Braille that they demonstrate their sensitivity; they also do so in completely everyday tasks – from checking the temperature of the first jets of water in our morning shower to lovingly patting the head of our sleeping pet.

Left *Softer under your bum and legs, harder on the backrest – the body feels the seat with every point of contact.* ***Below left*** *A pet feels good on several levels – it's cuddly and soft, snuggly and warm, and exerts a pleasant pressure on your lap.* ***Below right*** *A fragrant bath is like a spa cure for all the senses.*



CONSTANTLY NEW

It may be hard to believe, but our outermost layer of skin, the epidermis, completely renews itself every four weeks! To do so, it sheds a few grams of dead skin cells every day, while new cells are formed deeper down at its bottom layer and slowly migrate to the surface of the skin.

Smelling

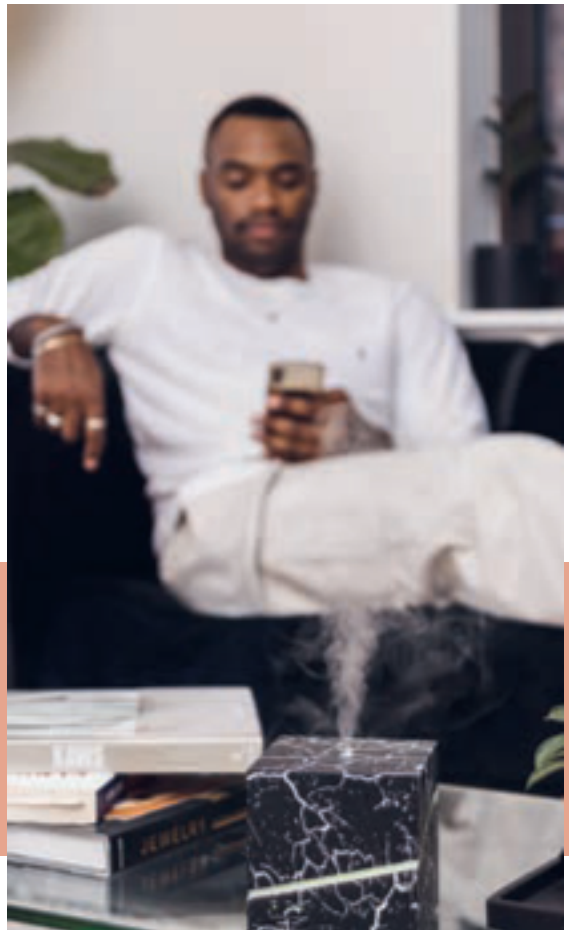
Have a sniff! Doesn't this smell great? Pleasant smells instantly make us happy and bring a smile to our faces. Yet our noses don't just sniff out new perfumes, freshly baked biscuits, the scent of summer flowers, the fragrance of newly fallen rain or the aroma of our favourite dish. No, they also detect hazards, from gas leaks to rotting food or fire smoke. Our sense of smell identifies threats the eyes can't see and the ears can't hear. And that's not all: our noses also ensure that our meals veritably explode in our mouths – because, while the tongue can only distinguish five types of flavours, the nose can sniff out over 10,000 scent profiles. How amazing is it that our sense of smell is so closely tied in with our sense of taste, creating a complete, multi-faceted flavour experience!

Here's how smell works: the olfactory mucosa right at the top of our nasal cavities contain something between 10 and 30 million olfactory receptor cells, equipped with receptors capable of distinguishing over 350 different scents. Dogs, incidentally, have ten times as many olfactory receptor cells as humans. Humans, plants and many objects excrete odorant molecules. This fragrance information is sent via nerve pathways to the olfactory bulb in the brain, which is responsible for processing these signals. It combines and transmits them, making it effectively the control centre for processing smells.

Our sense of smell is almost fully developed before we even leave the womb. It is vital for our survival; after all, newborns follow their nose when searching for their mothers' milk. Their sense of smell also plays a role when bonding with their parents. Surprisingly, it's possible to further hone our olfactory abilities. If you were to work with fragrances, you would train this sense and sensitivity every day by specifically sniffing scents and classifying them.

The way to a person's heart may be through the stomach – but it is definitely also through the nose, and if you temporarily lose your sense of smell, your meals won't taste very good or indeed of anything. Conversely, you may feel that someone 'gets up your nose' because the odorant molecules humans excrete also contain information on their genetic makeup. And these are much more than idiomatic phrases. While two people are initially appraising each other visually and exchanging some first words, the brain has long checked whether or not there's any 'chemistry' between them. Research conducted on animals has shown that living creatures generally seek out partners whose genetic makeup information is the most different from their own. This means there's a good chance of producing strong, resilient offspring.

Left *Pretty and decorative – sticks soak up the oils and release fragrance into the room.*
Below left *Fresh flowers are even prettier. Freesias, hyacinths and jasmine, for example, have an intense scent.*
Below right *An aroma diffuser can also help spread the desired scent in the room.*



MEMORIES

In the first three years of your life you collect most of the information that is stored in your olfactory memory. Incidentally, memories are often associated with particular smells. If you detect the scent, the specific event or feeling is immediately brought back to mind.

Right *Nothing beats a relaxed breakfast with an interesting book.*
Below left *To some people, coffee simply tastes too bitter, while others love exactly this intense aroma.*
Below right *If you cook fresh meals, chew thoroughly and concentrate on the food, you will train your tastebuds.*

HAPPY EATERS

Sweet foods make you happy. This reaction of brain and body dates back to the times when a sweet taste meant you were eating food which contained carbohydrates and therefore energy. Survival was assured. Today, however, a box of chocolates can still guarantee pure happiness.

Tasting

Mmmm, yummy! Our tastebuds start to sing and dance whenever culinary delights find their way into our mouths. Favourite meals instantly put us in a good mood, comfort food tastes like a sense of security and solace, while new flavours and unfamiliar ingredients and dishes create completely new experiences and moments of indulgence. Our sense of taste isn't just about enjoying delicious treats, however; it can also recognise things unfit for consumption. Extreme bitterness, for example, immediately repulses us, because humans used to be dependent on their sense of taste as a means of distinguishing between toxic and non-toxic foods – and many poisonous plants have a bitter taste.

Your sense of taste gets to work as soon as the first spoonful of vegetable soup lands in your mouth. Its most important tool is your tongue, whose surface contains the papillae – tiny mounds that are partially also visible to the naked eye. It's the papillae that absorb the flavouring substances, and inside these are the tastebuds, of which every human has thousands. Each tastebud in turn has up to 100 taste receptor cells, which collect the important information and transmit it to the cerebral cortex, where it is combined with information from the sense of smell. This creates a richly layered impression of the vegetable soup's composition, and this is of course also where you determine whether the dish is to your liking or not.

While humans are able to detect countless different types of smells, they can only distinguish between five types of tastes: sweet and salty, bitter and sour. The fifth is called umami, or savouriness, which denotes a spicy flavour found in high-protein foods like cheese or meat. Each type of taste stimulates the receptor cells differently, and is transmitted to the brain through the nerves.

The number of tastebuds decreases as we age. While a young person still has around 9,000, older people only have about half as many. In other words, our sense of taste dwindles over the years. Yet what we eat also affects our personal perception of taste. If you mostly eat freshly prepared food, you will have a much better sense of taste than someone who eats primarily flavour-enhanced ready-made meals.