



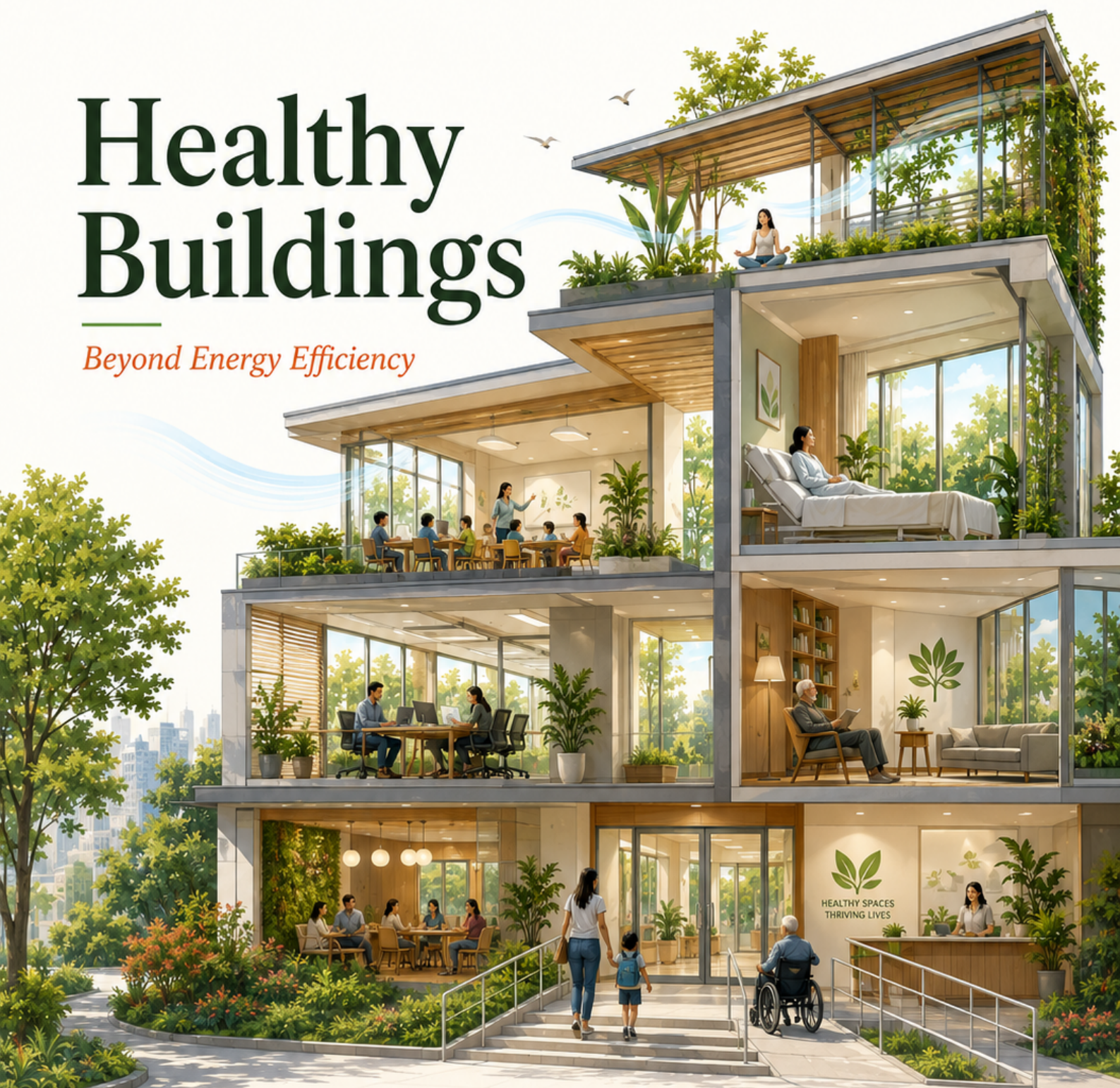
Green Thinking REVIEW

Promoting Innovations and Best Practices in
Sustainable Building for A Flourishing Future

GTR 80 | 17/07/2026

Healthy Buildings

Beyond Energy Efficiency



Floreat Vita | Let Life Flourish.



A Building Should Not Only Consume Less: It Should Help People Live Better.

A sustainable building is often judged by what it saves.

Energy saved.
Water saved.
Carbon reduced.
Waste avoided.

These are important measures. They help us understand how buildings affect the planet. They push designers, developers, builders, and policymakers to reduce harm and use resources more responsibly.

But a building is not only a consumer of resources. It is also a place of life.

People sleep in buildings. Children learn in them. Patients recover in them. Workers spend long hours in them. Families gather in them. Communities worship, serve, trade, rest, and make meaning within them.

This means that a building must be assessed not only by what it saves, but also by what it supports.

Does it support clean air?

Does it allow natural light?

Does it protect people from heat, noise, dampness, and discomfort?

Does it help people concentrate, recover, rest, and belong?

Does it respect human dignity?

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Healthy Buildings Are Life-Support Environments

Dear Green Thinkers,

For many years, sustainable building has been discussed largely through the language of energy: how much a building consumes, how efficiently it performs, and how much carbon it can save.

These questions remain important. But they are not enough.

A building may consume less energy and still fail the people who live, work, learn, heal, worship, or gather within it.

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It may be efficient, yet uncomfortable. It may be certified, yet poorly lit. It may reduce emissions, yet expose occupants to poor air, excessive noise, heat stress, glare, dampness, or spaces that diminish dignity and well-being.

*This is why the conversation must move beyond energy efficiency. A healthy building is more than a technical enclosure. It is a **life-support environment**.*

Its architecture becomes the system that organizes air, light, shade, comfort, movement, materials, acoustics, safety, nature, and human use into a place where people can function, recover, belong, and flourish.

*In this sense, architecture is not only about form. It is about relationships. The relationship between a room and daylight.
Between air and breath.
Between temperature and comfort.
Between materials and health.
Between space and dignity.
Between people and the natural world.*

*GTR 80 explores this wider understanding of sustainable building. **It asks us to consider not only how buildings perform for the planet, but how they perform for people.** Because the next chapter of sustainability cannot be measured by energy savings alone. It must also be measured by health, comfort, resilience, dignity, and life.*

A truly sustainable building should not only consume less. It should help people live better.

Let Life Flourish | Floreat Vita

– The Editorial Team

These questions are not secondary to sustainability. They are central to it.

A building that consumes less energy but leaves people uncomfortable, unhealthy, or disconnected from nature has not gone far enough. Efficiency without well-being is an incomplete achievement.

Healthy buildings begin with a deeper understanding of architecture.

Architecture is not simply the arrangement of walls, roofs, rooms, and façades. It is the ordering system that shapes how light enters, how air moves, how heat is moderated, how sound is controlled, how people move, how materials touch the body, and how spaces affect the mind.

The building is the life-support environment.

Architecture is the system that makes that environment work for life.

This is why healthy buildings must be designed intentionally from the beginning. Good air quality cannot be treated as an afterthought. Daylight cannot be reduced to window placement alone. Thermal comfort cannot depend only on mechanical systems. Acoustics, safety, accessibility, greenery, and dignity cannot be added at the end like decoration.

They must be part of the design logic.

GTR **Reflection**

A truly sustainable building should not only reduce harm. It should support life.

A healthy building works quietly. It does not always announce itself. It simply helps people breathe better, move easier, focus longer, rest deeper, recover faster, and feel more at home.

This is the future of sustainable building.

Not buildings that merely consume less, but buildings that support life more fully.

The next generation of green buildings must therefore be judged by a wider question:

Not only, how efficient is this building? But also, how well does this building

help people flourish?



Life-Support Environments: Seven Key Dimensions of a Healthy Building

Healthy buildings do not happen by accident. They are shaped by many decisions. This edition highlights seven key dimensions that every building project should intentionally consider.

1. Clean Air: A healthy building begins with the breath. Good ventilation, low-emission materials, moisture control, and proper filtration help reduce pollutants, odours, mould, and stale indoor air.

2. Natural Light: Daylight supports comfort, mood, alertness, and well-being. Healthy buildings bring in natural light without creating excessive glare or heat gain. The goal is not just brightness, but balanced illumination.

3. Thermal Comfort: People should not have to endure heat, cold, or discomfort indoors. Orientation, shading, insulation, ventilation, roof design, materials, and efficient cooling systems all contribute to stable and comfortable indoor conditions.

4. Acoustic Comfort: Noise affects concentration, rest, privacy, and mental health. Healthy buildings manage sound through planning, materials, room relationships, ceilings, walls, landscaping, and thoughtful separation of noisy and quiet zones.

5. Healthy Materials: Materials touch life more than we often realise. Finishes, paints, adhesives, furniture, flooring, and cleaning products should be selected with attention to safety, durability, emissions, maintenance, and long-term human exposure.

6. Connection to Nature: Plants, views, courtyards, natural textures, fresh air, water, and outdoor spaces help reconnect people with the living world. Biophilic design is not decoration; it is a way of restoring the relationship between people, buildings, and nature.



7. Human Dignity and Use: A healthy building must serve people well. It should be accessible, safe, inclusive, easy to move through, easy to maintain, and respectful of the people who occupy, clean, manage, and visit it.



Designing Healthy Buildings Begins with Intentional Decisions

1. Architects

Design for people before designing for performance ratings. Prioritize air, daylight, thermal comfort, acoustics, accessibility, safety, materials, and human dignity from the earliest concept stage.

2. Engineers & Consultants

Treat health as a performance requirement. Ventilation, cooling, lighting, acoustics, water systems, fire safety, and building services should work together to create safe, comfortable, and reliable indoor environments.

3. Developers & Property Owners

Look beyond first cost. A healthier building can improve comfort, productivity, satisfaction, maintenance outcomes, and long-term value. Invest in design choices that support people throughout the building's life.

4. Facility Managers

Protect the health intentions of the design. A building can only remain healthy if it is properly operated, cleaned, maintained, monitored, and adjusted over time. Maintenance is part of sustainability.

5. Occupants & Communities

Use buildings responsibly. Keep spaces clean, report faults early, protect ventilation paths, care for shared areas, and support practices that improve comfort, safety, and well-being for everyone.

Green Thinkers' Challenge

*This month, walk through a building you use regularly. Ask yourself: **Does this building help people breathe better, see better, hear better, move better, rest better, and feel better?** If the answer is unclear, then perhaps the building is only functioning as shelter. **A healthy building should do more. It should support life.***

Resources for Further Study

Learn More. Think Deeper. Design for Life.

READ

👉 The 9 Foundations of a Healthy Building:

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Link:

healthybuildings.hsph.harvard.edu/about/9-foundations-of-a-healthy-building/

The framework covers ventilation, air quality, thermal health, moisture, dust and pests, safety and security, water quality, noise, lighting and views.

👉 WHO Housing and Health Guidelines

World Health Organization. Link: who.int/publications/i/item/9789241550376

A global reference on how housing conditions influence health, safety, comfort, accessibility, and well-being.

EXPLORE

👉 The WELL Building Standard:

International WELL Building Institute

Link: wellcertified.com WELL provides an evidence-based roadmap for creating people-first places that support health and well-being.

👉 Indoor Air Quality:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Link: epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq

A practical source on indoor environmental quality, pollutants, ventilation, and ways to improve indoor air where people live, learn, work, and play.

THINK DEEPER

👉 Health & Wellbeing Framework

World Green Building Council. Link:

worldgbc.org/healthy-equity-resilience/health-framework/

A broader framework connecting healthy, equitable buildings with nature, resilience, comfort, and better places for people.



Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital: Designing a Healing Environment



Landscaped spaces. Image Credit: Google/
www.worldlandscapearchitect.com

Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital in Johannesburg offers a powerful African example of how architecture can support health beyond medical treatment alone.

The hospital was conceived as a place where children, families, doctors, nurses, and caregivers could experience healthcare within a more humane and healing environment. Rather than relying on the typical image of a deep, closed, institutional hospital block, the design is organized around courtyards, gardens, natural light, and child-sensitive spaces. These decisions matter.

Daylight helps reduce the harshness often associated with hospital environments. Gardens and views to nature provide moments of calm for children and families under stress. Natural ventilation and shallow floor plates allow the building to breathe more effectively. The spatial organization also helps create a clearer, more welcoming experience for users.

The lesson is simple but profound: a hospital is not only a container for medical services. It is part of the healing environment.

For GTR 80, Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital reminds us that healthy buildings must care for the whole person – body, mind, dignity, movement, comfort, and emotional well-being.

A building that supports healing begins long before treatment starts. It begins with how people arrive, how they move, what they see, what they breathe, how they rest, and whether the space reassures or overwhelms them.

Green Thinking Insights

Health, Buildings and Human Flourishing

- ✎ A building that saves energy but harms health has not gone far enough.
- ✎ Healthy buildings begin with the breath. Air quality is not invisible when it affects how people feel, think, work, learn, and recover.
- ✎ Daylight is more than illumination. It shapes mood, alertness, comfort, and the human experience of space.
- ✎ Thermal comfort is not luxury. It is part of dignity, productivity, rest, and well-being.
- ✎ Noise is also an environmental condition. A healthy building must protect attention, privacy, recovery, and peace.
- ✎ Materials matter because people live in contact with them every day. What a building is made of affects what it gives back to the body.
- ✎ Nature should not be treated as decoration. It is part of the life-support relationship between people, buildings, and the environment.
- ✎ A healthy building is not only designed at completion. It must be maintained, cleaned, operated, and cared for throughout its life.



2040: When Buildings Become Caregivers

By 2040, the healthiest buildings may not be the most dramatic. They may be the quietest. Not quiet because they are silent, but because they support life without constantly announcing themselves.

Imagine a school where classrooms are filled with balanced daylight, fresh air, reduced noise, and comfortable temperatures that help children learn with less fatigue.

Imagine an office where workers no longer endure poor ventilation, glare, heat stress, or restless acoustics as the hidden cost of productivity.

Imagine a hospital where recovery is supported not only by medicine, but by air, light, views, gardens, movement, privacy, and calm.

Imagine homes where children breathe better, older adults move safely, families rest more deeply, and materials do not quietly harm the people they shelter.

In that future, buildings are no longer judged only by how much energy they save. They are judged by how well they support life. The building becomes more than an enclosure. It becomes a life-support environment – a place where design decisions protect health, comfort, dignity, and well-being. Architecture becomes the system that makes this possible.

It organizes the relationship between air and breath, light and mood, temperature and comfort, sound and peace, movement and safety, nature and belonging.

The future of healthy buildings will not belong only to advanced technologies or expensive certifications. It will belong to designers, clients, builders, facility managers,

policymakers, and communities who understand that every building shapes the people within it.

The question for 2040 is not only whether our buildings became efficient. It is whether they became humane.

A Question for Today:

Walk into a building you use often – your home, office, school, church, clinic, market, or public facility. Pause and ask: **Does this building help people breathe better, see better, hear better, move better, rest better, and feel better?** If the answer is unclear, then the building may be functioning only as shelter. A healthy building should do more. It should support life. **Healthy buildings are life-support environments.**



GTR Closing Reflection:

The buildings of the future should not only reduce environmental harm. They should help people live, heal, learn, work, rest, and flourish.

Floreat Vita | Let Life Flourish.

The Life-Support Ecology



Healthy buildings do not exist in isolation.
They shape—and are shaped by—air, water,
landscape, mobility, infrastructure, and community.

Together, they form a life-support ecology
where people and nature thrive in balance.

Design for relationships. Build for life.

Floreat Vita | Let Life Flourish.



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