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# Disentangling Eudaemonia-focused Design as a Means of Flourishing Curation

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The connection between humans and their homes is one that has been documented for centuries. However, the extent to which our built environments impact human physical, mental, and social health was not fully understood by the general public until the COVID-19 pandemic made this topic one of necessity and, therefore, everyday discourse. One group that was impacted most extremely by the pandemic was the older adult community. The loneliness epidemic that had begun pre-COVID was exacerbated by widespread quarantine mandates—ones especially common in countries like Australia. This older demographic needed not only to occupy home environments that supported their needs and desires but also to be meaningfully engaged during these isolating times. This presentation shares findings based on PhD research conducted in Australia in 2021, at a time when older adults were experiencing isolation during still-prevalent periods of lockdown throughout the country. It explores how intentional and fun creative activities were conducted virtually with older adults at home to engage participants remotely for the purpose of disentangling complex subjects relating to Human Building Interaction (specifically, older adult occupants, homes, and smart home technologies) and the emotional aspects of past, present, and desired future homes. The research was based on the premise of designing for the positive psychology construct of Aristotle's eudaemonia—an interpretation of flourishing health, synonymous with being one's best self—by considering an idyllic thriving future in addition to the tenets of self-determination theory, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The art of exploring tangible design activities while considering

eudaemonia leisurely at home resulted in the older adults identifying eudaemonic home design principles as planned as well as experiencing unexpected motivation, making improvements in their spaces and lives. The research contributes to knowledge about architectural design elements that cultivate flourishing health and well-being at home but also informs design praxis—underscoring how intentional design done even virtually has the potential to uncomplicate abstract or delicate subject matter, improve research and design experiences and prompt the realisation of people's best selves.

KEYWORDS: eudaemonia, health, well-being, built environments, architecture, smart buildings, co-design, creative methods, inclusive design

RSD TOPIC(S): RSD: Architecture & Planning, RSD: Health & Well-Being, RSD: Methods & Methodology

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## Introduction

According to the International WELL Building Institute (Johnston, 2020, p. 8), "Buildings are where we live our lives…they can help, or they can hinder." Though a significant majority of humans are impacted by their environments (Klepeis et al., 2001; Roberts, 2016; U.S. EPA, 1989), solutions are often limited to tactical means of addressing physical ailments rather than promoting human flourishing or approaches that balance comprehensive physical, mental, and social health. As recognised by Churchill, "[w]e shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us." (1943, l. 4) Thus, there is a positive health and well-being opportunity to be realised by changing the way that buildings, especially homes, are designed.

Homes represent a deep connection with humans and human evolution, depicting aspects of etiquette protocols, daily activities, and space usage (Busch, 1999; Gallagher, 2007). Our built environments are viewed as representative of ourselves or, as Cooper Marcus (2007, p. 3) suggests, "a mirror of self". Our connection to our homes has always been psychologically significant, almost visceral (Huskinson, 2018; McGuire & Hull, 1977). However, given the home's newly established prominence in our daily lives as

both personal and professional space and given recent research uncovering how home environments are less healthy than offices (Clark, 2022), a more care-full (i.e., filled with or driven by care) consideration of what it means to design for home health and well-being is required as a matter of priority (Mikus et al., 2022).

One demographic that spends the largest percentage of time indoors, especially in private residences, is the 65+ older adult demographic (delos Team, 2018). Given the high percentage of time spent at home—up to 99% during COVID-19 (Abdel-Salam, 2022)—and their purported deeper connections to space (Donnelly et al., 2020), community (Pipher, 2000), and belongings in the form of "habituated objects" (Brereton, 2013, p. 20), developing an understanding and response to their home experience is important. It is crucial that occupants and designers understand what constitutes a health-supportive environment and design for it. Accordingly, environments must satisfy all three aspects of health: physical, mental, and social at a minimum (Murthy et al., 2002) or, ideally, exceed them.

## Flourishing environments to promote flourishing humans

Over the past nearly 10 years, buildings have become recognised as playing an important role in creating healthy versus ill environments (Allen, 2020). But building design can do more than deliver health outcomes in the form of preventing sickness; it can encourage flourishing levels of health and well-being. By designing for eudaemonic well-being, based on Aristotle's concept of eudaemonia (i.e., being one's best self) and substantiated in philosophy (Aufderheide, 2020) and psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017; Ryff, 1989, 2017; Waterman, 1984, 1993, 2013), occupants might not only experience flourishing health but also become motivated with enhanced feelings of personal growth and purpose.

In this presentation, the potential for design done for eudaemonic well-being—an approach this author calls eudaemonic design—is explored, examined, and articulated as a differentiated and concrete means of flourishing-focused design (Clements-Croome, 2020; Stevens et al., 2019; Townshend, 2020) in a case study that considers Australian older adults (Mikus, 2023). Interrelationships across older adults aged 65-80, living alone, and wishing to age in place, their homes, and smart building

technology are examined via Research through Co-design (Busciantella-Ricci & Scataglini, 2020) conducted with designers virtually during periods of lockdown in Australia throughout 2021.

## Employing a care-full approach for empowerment and meaning

By care-fully employing creative methods with an inclusively facilitated co-design approach, it became possible to define how home environments—both physical and digital (Ewart & Luck, 2012)—might be curated to precipitate eudaemonia at home while simultaneously uncovering the value of in situ design (i.e., considering home when at home) for virtual research. This design approach allowed participants to stay home and engage on their terms, remaining comfortable while creatively considering the subject matter of past, present, and eudaemonic future homes.

The employed three phases that leveraged past-informing-the-future design precipitated participants' uninterrupted beginning-to-end engagement in the project, high quality and quantity of participation, and unintended yet welcome consequences of behavioural change ranging from tidying up, decorating, and biophilically updating spaces to experiencing enhanced feelings of growth and purpose. Therefore, in addition to achieving the aimed-for ED model and set of design principles to achieve flourishing home design, the process was recognised as informing respectful design praxis that examined personal past and present experiences with desired futures while considering an abstract subject matter (e.g., eudaemonia) and design construct (e.g., Human Building Interaction's physical and digital considerations). Most importantly, the research underscored how occupants can be empowered via virtually-conducted creative methods to be their best selves simply through intentional design that activated curiosity, facilitated prolific thought, and prompted meaning.

## Conclusion

Buildings are key to curating a eudaemonically healthy and meaningful life. Older adults, especially those living alone, face challenges in the future as they age, diversify, and constitute a larger subset of the population. As was uncovered in this doctoral study, eudaemonic design offers a means of curating eudaemonic environments and

conducting meaningful praxis that may prove beneficial for older adults at home—strengthening their relationships with home, encouraging feelings of gratitude, and improving their day-to-day lives.

This presentation interrogates the intentional and inclusive Research through the co-design methodology behind the chosen methods, how it met the needs of the brief, contributed to this research from a human-building interaction (HBI) perspective, and might be applied proactively as a means of inclusive design in the future. Further, it reflects on how flourishing goals and objectives considered collaboratively disentangled the perceived complicated construct of eudaemonia and resulted in the consideration of physical and technological solutions in a non-intimidating way, a final design product, and most importantly, realised participant empowerment by elevating voice and emphasising agency.

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