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A Color Guild Member Exclusive Presentation

Neuroaesthetics: How Color & Design Affect Subconscious Behavior

The Role of Functional Color to Support Focus & Performance

AIA: CG-ND-101 Session __ 1 HSW LU



Course Description:

This course introduces key neuroaesthetic and neuroarchitectural research and demonstrates how this science can be applied through specific design elements to shape nervous-system response within the built environment. The course examines how color, form, light, materiality, and spatial hierarchy function as an integrated perceptual system, and how environments are processed biologically through visual organization, contrast, pattern recognition, and sensory coherence. Drawing from neuroscience, environmental psychology, applied perception research (including insights from real-world UX and neuromarketing studies), and Gestalt design principles, participants learn which design cues initiate specific responses such as threat versus safety signaling, attentional load, sensory friction, and physiological regulation. Emphasis is placed on color selection, palette development, and chromatic application strategies that support nervous-system stability and preferred behavioral outcomes. Participants learn how the body reads design cues as biological information—shaping stress response, attention, emotional regulation, and behavior below conscious awareness—and how these effects can be evaluated, specified, and intentionally designed.

Learning Objectives: Participants will

- Explain how color, contrast, spatial hierarchy, and visual relationships are processed by the nervous system and influence stress response and subconscious behavior in built environments.
- Identify and evaluate design conditions that activate stress responses versus those that support nervous-system regulation using principles from neuroaesthetics, environmental psychology, and Gestalt perception theory.
- Apply neuroaesthetic principles through color selection, palette development, contrast control, material coordination, and spatial organization to guide behavioral and biological responses.
- Integrate nervous-system-informed design strategies, including perceptual frameworks used in real-world UX and applied behavioral research, into professional practice to support human health, safety, and long-term environmental performance.

To have this presented live (in-person or virtual) for your firm or group, reach out to Fawn Chang:

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HSW Justification

This course examines how visual and spatial design conditions influence nervous-system function, stress response, cognitive load, and behavioral regulation in the built environment. It provides architects with practical methods for using color, contrast, and spatial organization to improve perceptual clarity, reduce stress-related risk factors, and support safe navigation, directly advancing occupant health, safety, and welfare. Research in neuroscience, environmental psychology, and neuroarchitecture demonstrates which design variables either activate physiological stress responses or support emotional regulation and perceptual stability. Environments that produce chronic sensory overload, visual ambiguity, or threat signaling are associated with increased anxiety, fatigue, impaired decision-making, and reduced situational awareness, with direct implications for safety, long-term health, and functional performance. The course teaches architects how to identify and evaluate these conditions using neuroaesthetic principles and perceptual frameworks, including Gestalt organization and applied behavioral research, and how to translate them into intentional design strategies that improve environmental legibility, orientation, and behavioral stability across building types.

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