



BUSA
WOODWARD

VISITOR TREND REPORT 2025 EXPERIENCE



DARK PATTERNS

NATURE

SEN ALPHA

ANALOGUE OASIS

REBUILD ONLINE TRUST

EXCITING FIVE STARS

WEARY

MORC

VHS TAPES

BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

CITY WALKS

SMALL GESTURES

WANT WALK CAT!

NEURO SCIENCE

UP

About this report

Introduction

People are wonderfully complex—unpredictable, and ever-evolving—and this year, they are reflecting on simpler times while seeking to rebalance their digital reliance with real-world activities.

Today, individuals are adapting faster than ever, shaped by shifting priorities, technological leaps, and cultural currents. This report dives into some of the trends and behaviours that will shape experiences in 2025 – nostalgic, healthy, emotional, adaptive, and happier interactions.

The ideas throughout this report are meant to help drive new experience approaches

This is a year of readjustment: a time for questioning digital habits, living in the moment, prioritising people, and re-evaluating wellbeing and trust. These shifts, which are profoundly influencing how individuals reclaim their free time, can have a positive influence on how we design visitor experiences to recapture audience imagination.



Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2025, the urgent need to transform urban spaces and integrate nature is clearer than ever. The conventional city, with its monotony of concrete and glass, not only stifles creativity but also exacerbates mental and physical health issues.

The rise of "The Nature Reset" underscores the importance of rethinking our urban landscapes and focus on delight, emotional engagement, and biophilic design. By blending vibrant public spaces, greenery, and art, cities can become havens of well-being with stronger communities.

As cities evolve, nature's role is being rediscovered. Integrating green infrastructure like rooftop gardens, urban forests, and rain gardens offers more than visual appeal—it directly contributes to improved air quality, reduced stress, and better overall health.

Leading examples, such as Singapore's vertical gardens, demonstrate the immense value of these sustainable, health-boosting urban ecosystems.

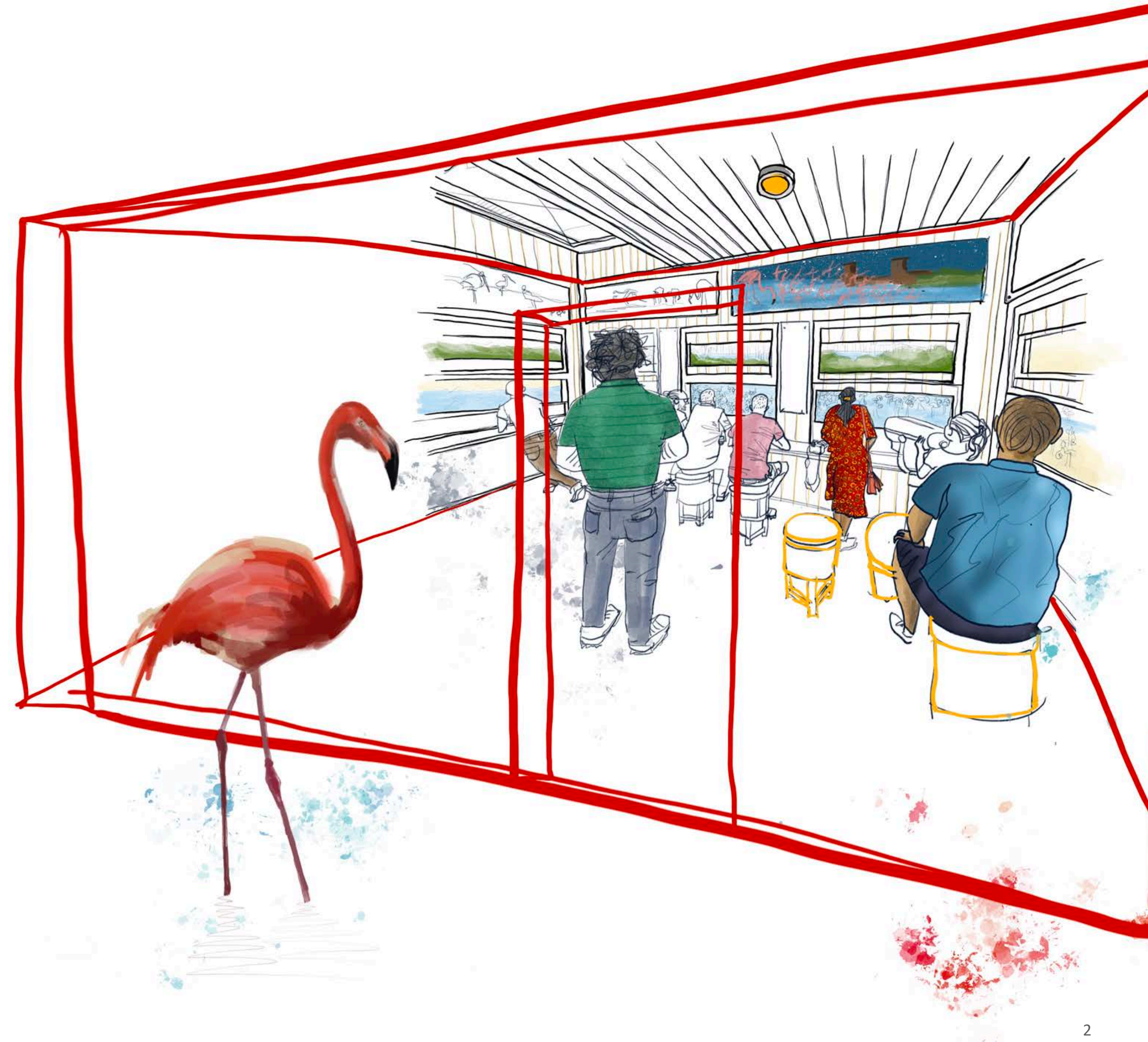
The Nature Reset extends beyond cities to include a radical shift in how we interact with the animal kingdom. Advances in artificial intelligence are bringing us closer to decoding animal communication, potentially revolutionising conservation and fostering

deeper empathy between humans and animals.

As these developments unfold, it could redefine the visitor experience, allowing people to engage with animals on a more meaningful level.

At the same time, why not plants? Every day there are more scientific discoveries and insights about their social complex behaviour.

The future envisions AI bridging the gap between humanity and nature, fostering greater understanding and respect for the natural world.



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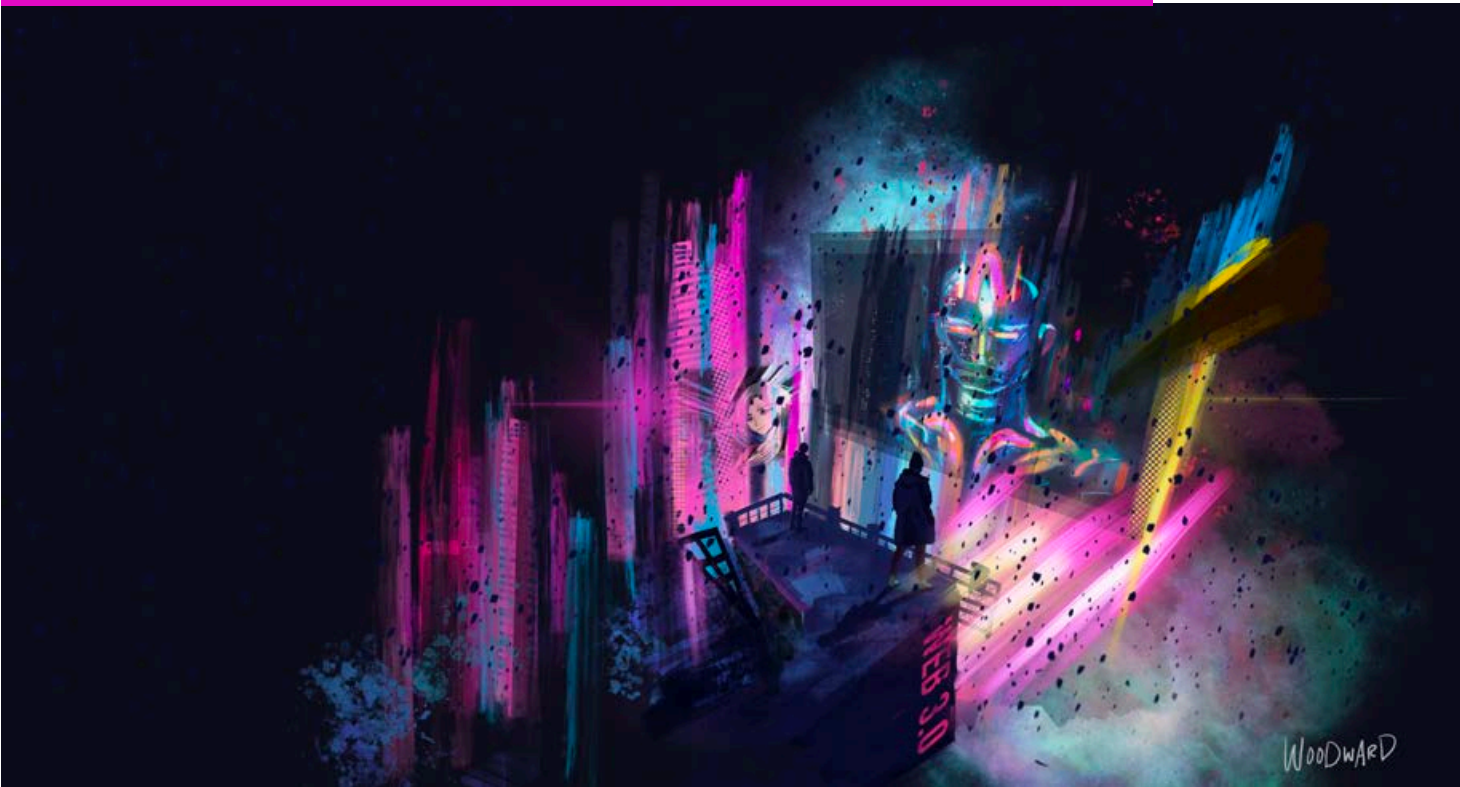
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Trend 1:

Nature Reset

Urban Sprawls Threaten our Health

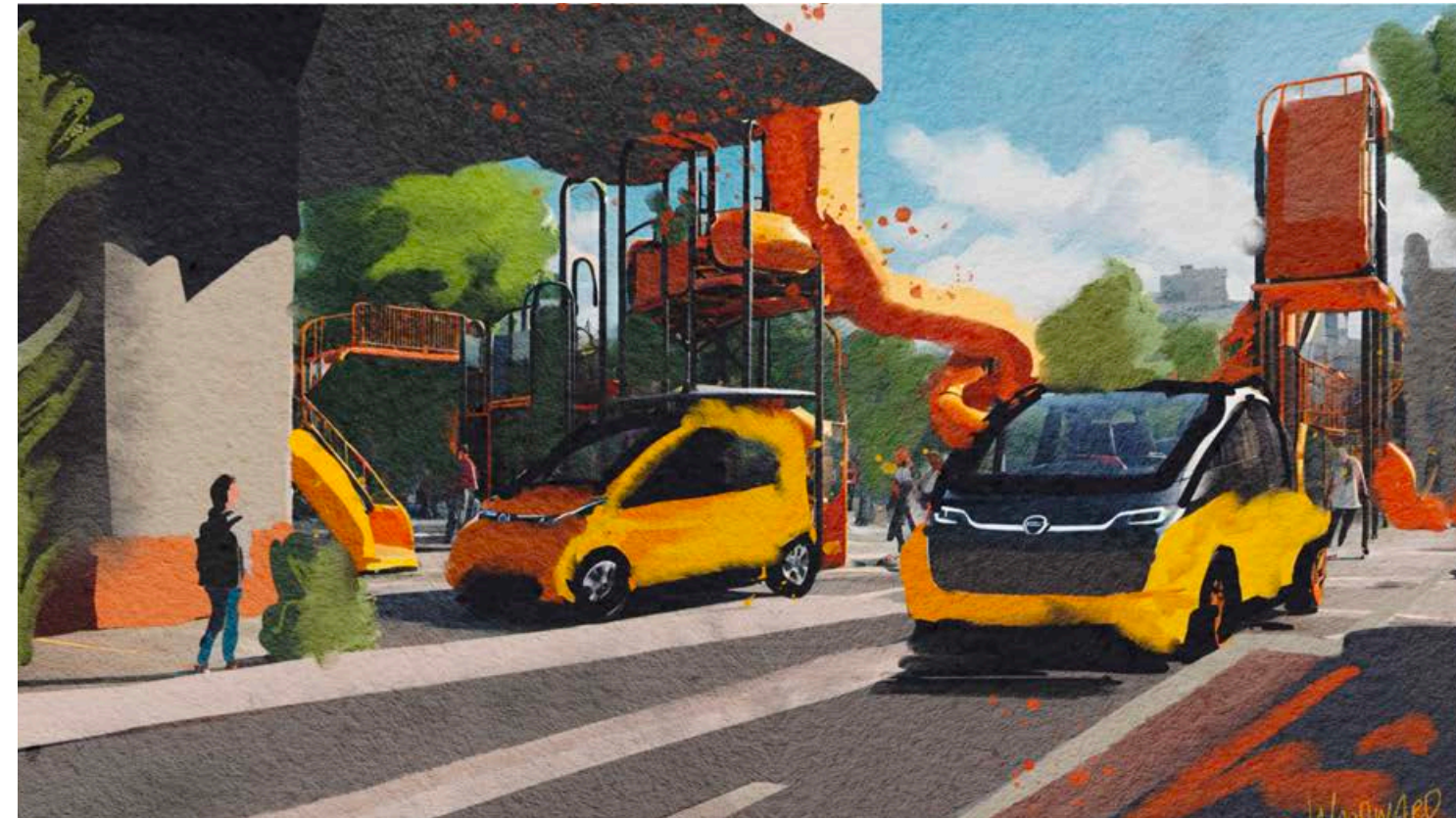
Nature Reset

Cities should be vibrant hubs of inspiration and connection, but too often, they become monotonous grids of grey. Oppressive, understimulating architecture isn't just dull—it's detrimental to our health.

Studies reveal that bleak urban environments can increase stress levels, even leading to chronic inflammation (in neuroscience it's referred to as neuro-inflammation) in residents. Living in a visually and emotionally barren cityscape does more than drain the spirit; it actively impacts mental and physical well-being.

Some examples from neuroscientific research include the neuro-stresses triggered from walking past glass buildings at street level [with all their reflections], plain concrete walls, and fenced off construction areas – people tend to [unconsciously] walk faster past these particular environments.

The root of the problem lies in the way many cities are designed. Functional but lifeless, these urban spaces prioritise efficiency over emotion.



Colourful Playful Cities | Image: Mark Woodward

Without thoughtful design, residents are left surrounded by soulless buildings and concrete expanses that stifle creativity and joy. The psychological toll is significant, affecting how people interact with their environment and each other.

In 2025, it's time to recognise that the aesthetics of our cities are just as crucial as their infrastructure and extremely important to our well-being.

The solution? What we often refer to as delight is about the harmony and meaning of spaces—a feeling of well-being that neuroscience calls a "homeostatic state," where the body and mind feel balanced and at ease. It's not

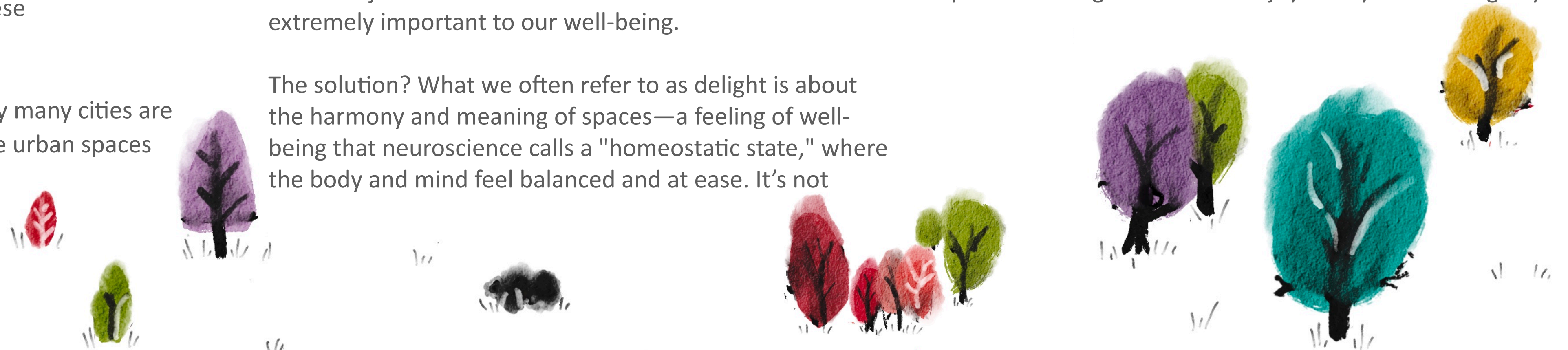
how far you walk but about what you see, hear, and feel as you walk. Think about parks: vibrant greenery, interactive public art installations, and playful spaces that invite exploration can transform cities into sources of happiness.

Human-centric design is less about the efficiency of a 15-minute city and more about diversity in spaces – “interesting spaces”.

Even small changes, like adding murals or planting trees along streets, can transform a city's atmosphere and its residents' well-being.

In 2025, we stand at a crossroads. By concentrating on cheerful, stimulating urban design, we can create cities that nurture the body and soul. It's not just about making places more beautiful—it's about fostering healthier, happier communities.

Let's move away from the monotony and build cities that inspire and energise—because a joyful city is a thriving city.



The City Forest

Nature Reset



In 2025, the path to healthier living starts in the heart of our cities. With urbansation on the rise, access to nature has become a luxury. But what if we brought the forest to the city? Studies show that integrating green spaces into urban design is more than just aesthetically pleasing—it's a vital remedy for mental and physical health. Nature has the power to reduce stress, improve air quality, and even boost immune systems, making it an essential element of city living.

The problem is clear: traditional cities prioritise concrete over canopies, leaving residents disconnected from the natural world. The result is a range of urban ills, from poor air quality to increased stress and loneliness. Yet, cities with abundant greenery—like Singapore's lush vertical gardens or Copenhagen's expansive parks—demonstrate the transformative power of nature. These spaces don't just look good; they actively enhance quality of life.

Imagine streets lined with trees, rooftops covered in gardens, and parks that serve as communal gathering spots. Green infrastructure like rain gardens, living walls, and urban forests can turn concrete jungles into thriving ecosystems. By favouring biophilic design—the concept of connecting humans to nature—we can create environments that are more comforting, with more considered lighting, fostering health, happiness, and resilience.

Treehouses in the back garden and forest escapes are out of reach for many, it's time to rethink our cities. The forest doesn't have to be a distant dream; pocket-forests in urban neighbourhoods with rope-bridge and zip-line style playgrounds above the streets, designed for fun and functionality, where nature can also flourish can be part of our daily lives.



IKEA has shared free plans for The Growroom, a beautiful, multi-layered spherical garden designed to grow enough fresh food to nourish an entire neighborhood—offering a sustainable and inspiring way to bring communities together.

Image: Artist impression
Designed by SPACE10 and architects:
Mads-Ulrik Husum and Sine Lindholm

Is the New Visitor Experience Talking to Animals?

Nature Reset

Imagine walking into a zoo or a wildlife park and, instead of reading plaques, you're having a real-time conversation with a dolphin or an elephant. Ok, maybe that's a stretch, but... thanks to advancements in artificial intelligence, the once sci-fi dream of interspecies communication is edging closer to reality.

Researchers are racing to decode animal sounds, from whale songs to bird chirps, in hopes of unlocking their meaning. With hefty cash prizes driving innovation, the prospect of animal translation is no longer a distant fantasy.

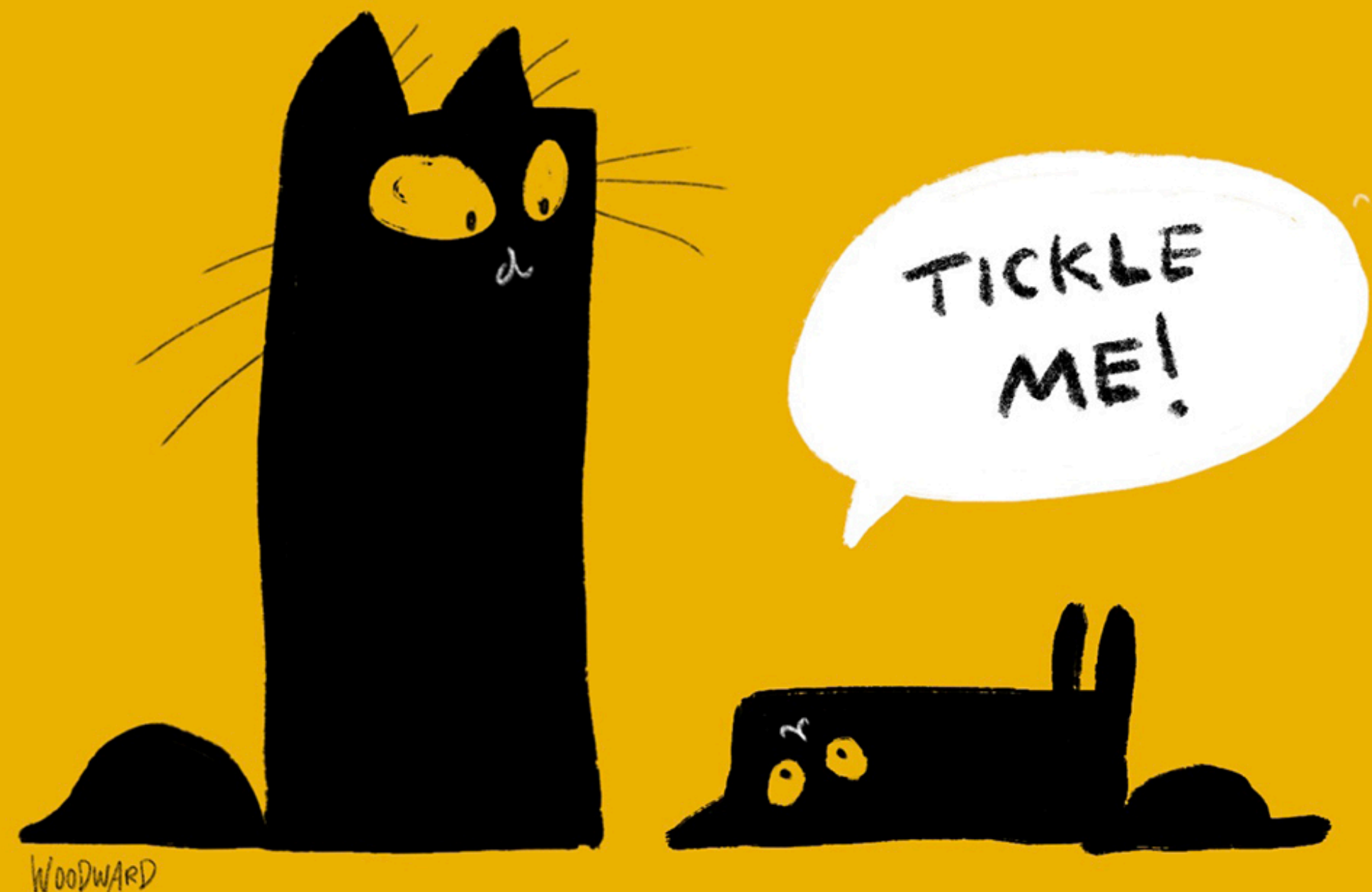
AI is the game-changer here, processing vast amounts of data to detect patterns in animal vocalisations and behaviours. Projects like Earth Species and CETI (Cetacean Translation Initiative) are making headlines as they deploy machine learning to break down the complex calls of whales and other animals. But this raises a fascinating question: what, exactly, would animals want to say to us? Would a parrot talk politics? Would a cat have attitude, or would they have deeper insights to share about life, survival, and their perception of the human world?

The implications of animal translation go far beyond novelty. It could revolutionise conservation efforts, giving endangered species a literal voice to communicate their needs. Farmers might gain insights from their livestock, and pet owners could finally settle debates over what their cats are meowing about at 3 a.m.

Yet, there's also a moral quandary: are we prepared to hear what animals truly think of us and the world we've created for them? It's a humbling thought.

As we edge closer to breaking the communication barrier, the new visitor experience might not be about seeing animals but truly understanding them. Whether it's through a smartphone app translating a bird's call or a guided tour narrated by the resident orangutan, the possibilities are as thrilling as they are mind-bending.

Interspecies translation could redefine our relationship with the animal kingdom, forcing us to listen—and perhaps, finally, to learn.





Trend 2:

Life in High Definition

AI Steps reaches into the Real World

Life in High Definition

Artificial intelligence has already conquered the digital realm, mastering everything from language processing to game strategy. But for AI to truly revolutionise the physical world, it needs to get its hands dirty—literally. Enter physical AI: the ability for machines to navigate the unpredictable, chaotic nature of real-world environments.

From picking up fragile objects to adapting to slippery surfaces, AI is starting to grapple with the messy side of existence.

This leap is no small feat. Unlike the structured confines of data sets or virtual simulations, the physical world is full of surprises.

A robot sorting recycling might encounter crumpled paper one moment and shattered glass the next. Teaching AI to adapt on the fly requires advances in machine learning, sensors, and robotics.

Companies like Boston Dynamics and OpenAI are leading the charge, creating robots that can run, jump, and even dance—all while responding to unpredictable scenarios.



The implications are significant, particularly in reducing the strain on physical assets. By utilising food delivery robots, drones, and other on-demand delivery systems, there's less need for large food trucks or dedicated F&B buildings. This shift can streamline urban spaces, lower operational costs, and reduce environmental impact, paving the way for more efficient and sustainable cities.

As AI gains physical abilities, it's not just about machines becoming more capable—it's about reshaping our relationship with technology. When robots can seamlessly interact with the physical world, they stop being tools and start becoming collaborators. It's a thrilling, if slightly unnerving, glimpse into the future—where AI doesn't just think but acts, learning to navigate the beautiful, chaotic complexity of our reality.

Designing for Happiness

Life in High Definition

Happiness isn't some distant, glittering prize—it's often right in front of us, hidden in plain sight. In the public realm, just like in our personal and professional lives, simple joys are easily overlooked amidst the hustle of urban environments and civic systems.

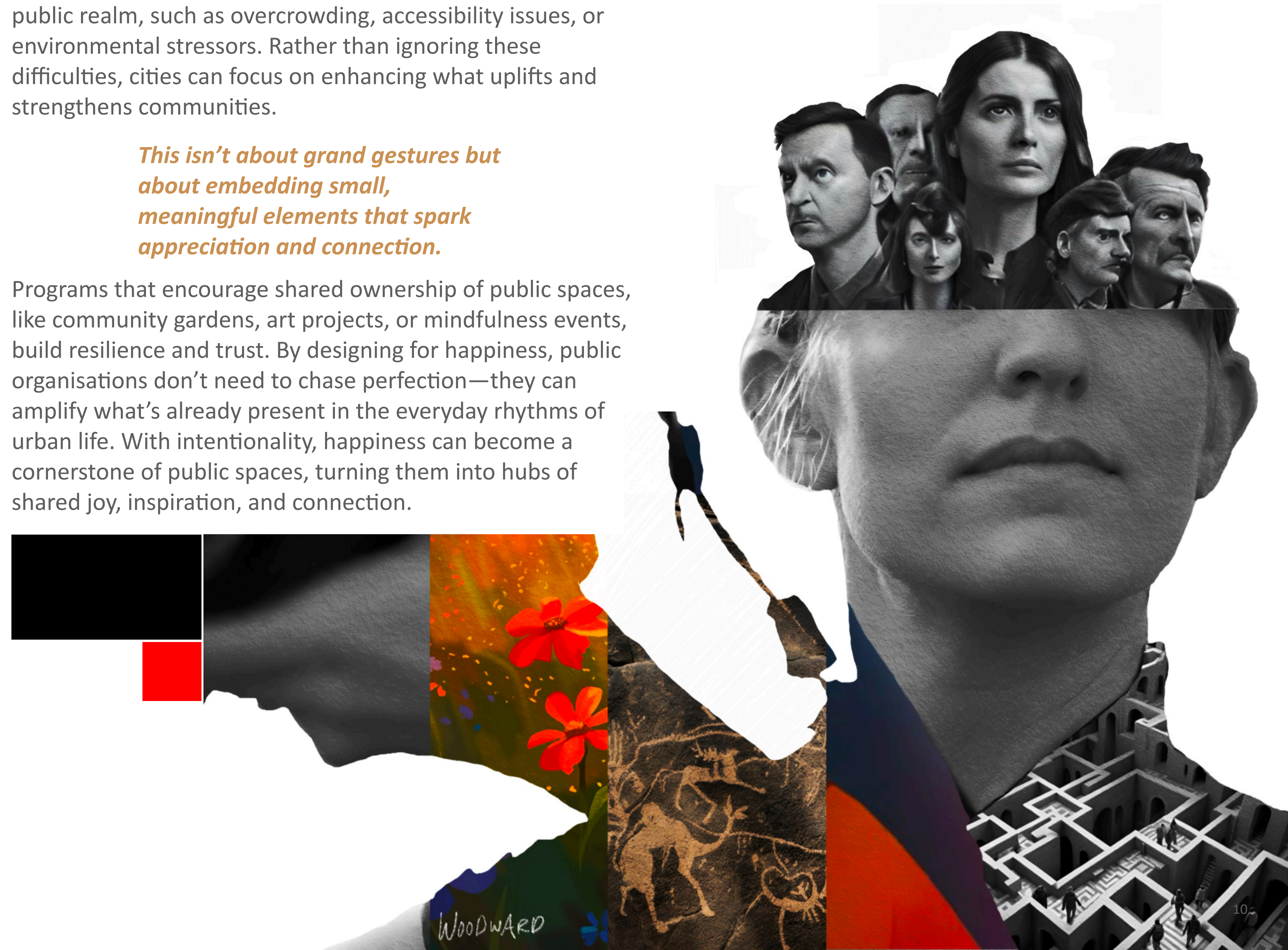
But imagine a public space where happiness is intentionally designed into the experience—where everyday treasures like the warmth of sunlight on a park bench, the sound of children playing, or a shared smile with a stranger can transform how people feel in and interact with their environment. These seemingly small moments offer profound lessons for cities, planners, and public organisations looking to create spaces that foster well-being and connection.

Highly sought after wow moments designed for thrill may well trigger adrenaline but we also tire of them. Instead, we need places with a sense of belonging, curated like a home, with attention to small details, hidden stories, mind-friendly patterns. In the public realm, this means designing spaces that encourage people to pause and tune in to their surroundings. Placemaking efforts can celebrate small wins by highlighting natural beauty, creating interactive and inclusive areas, and offering opportunities for community reflection and connection.

This approach also acknowledges challenges within the public realm, such as overcrowding, accessibility issues, or environmental stressors. Rather than ignoring these difficulties, cities can focus on enhancing what uplifts and strengthens communities.

This isn't about grand gestures but about embedding small, meaningful elements that spark appreciation and connection.

Programs that encourage shared ownership of public spaces, like community gardens, art projects, or mindfulness events, build resilience and trust. By designing for happiness, public organisations don't need to chase perfection—they can amplify what's already present in the everyday rhythms of urban life. With intentionality, happiness can become a cornerstone of public spaces, turning them into hubs of shared joy, inspiration, and connection.



Before the feed

Life in High Definition



Gen Z and Gen Alpha are taking a trip down memory lane to a time they never actually experienced: the 1990s. To them, it's an era of untethered freedom, where people lived without the constant buzz of notifications or the pressure of curated Instagram feeds.

The '90s now hold a certain mystique—an analog oasis where kids hung out in person, listened to mixtapes on Walkmans, and relied on landlines to make plans. It's not just nostalgia; it's fascination.

To generations raised on smartphones, the idea of existing *unplugged* seems almost revolutionary, a glimpse into what life might feel like without being tethered to the grid.

TikTok and Instagram are filled with Gen Z and Gen Alpha recreating '90s aesthetics—think flannel shirts, butterfly clips, and grungy band tees. They stream *Friends* and *The X-Files* like they're brand-new and romanticise VHS tapes and Polaroid cameras for their tactile charm. But it's more than just fashion and trends; it's a longing for a different kind of connection.

The '90s represent a slower pace, where people weren't glued to screens but to moments—Saturday mornings with cartoons, afternoons spent skateboarding, and evenings playing *Mario Kart* with friends.

It's a lifestyle that feels refreshingly real in a hyper-digital world. You only need to search YouTube for '90s high school videos' to see videos pushing millions of views with comments celebrating '...the moment'.

For Gen Z and Gen Alpha, the allure of the 1990s is a mix of curiosity and rebellion—a way to imagine life beyond the algorithms. It's not about ditching modern tech altogether but about borrowing the best of the analog age: authenticity, simplicity, and unfiltered joy.

Whether they're collecting vinyl records or trying to master the art of leaving someone on "read" because, in the '90s, no one replied instantly, their embrace of the past is reshaping how they think about the present. And honestly? We could all use a little more '90s energy.

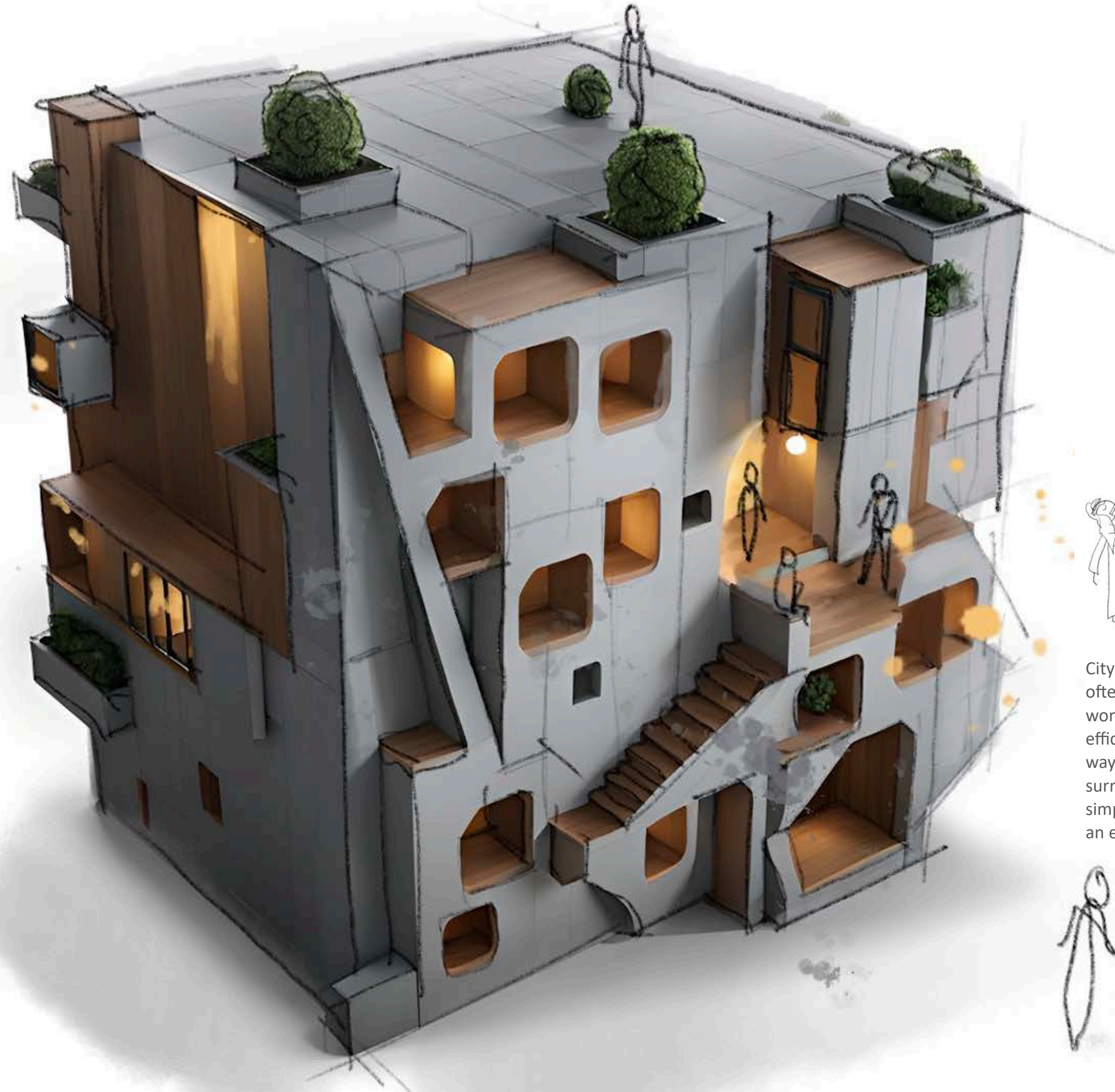
Rediscovering the hidden culture

Life in High Definition

City walks, the modern-day echo of the French *flânerie*, have emerged [following COVID-19] as a popular activity for the under 30s, rediscovering the charm of their own cities.

It's not about rushing to landmarks or ticking off itineraries; it's about savoring the moment—finding beauty in a forgotten alley, the curve of an old facade, or the hum of a bustling café. These unhurried urban strolls are less about the destination and more about the journey, offering an irresistible mix of mindfulness and visual storytelling that's tailor-made for the digital age.

In China, this trend has taken on a life of its own on Xiaohongshu, where curated snapshots and bite-sized travelogues dominate the feeds. From hidden neighbourhoods to picture-perfect cafés, the platform's users have turned city walks into a form of art, blending exploration with personal branding. Every step becomes a frame, every moment a story, as hashtags like #CityWalk transform ordinary streets into photogenic masterpieces. It's more than just a trend—it's a cultural phenomenon that celebrates creativity and connection in a way that resonates deeply with younger generations.

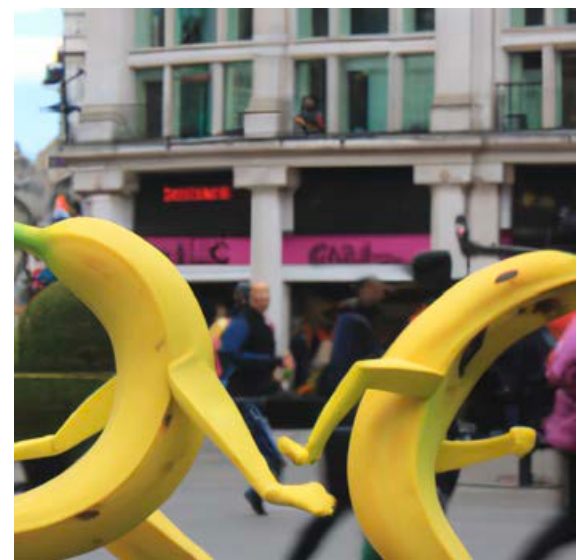


City walks remind us that wonder is often closer than we think. In a world obsessed with speed and efficiency, they offer a slower, richer way to connect—with our cities, our surroundings, and ourselves. A simple stroll, it seems, can open up an entire world.



Hand-Drawn Aesthetics Drive Experiences

Life in High Definition



Early 2023 there were mixed feelings among illustrators, designers, photographers and the creative disciplines and have been affected either from the way they work, clients quashing fees, and lack of work as clients bring image creation and content in-house.

“... during an initial meeting an agency client threatened to use AI in-house if I didn't reduce my fees...”

– Comment from a Freelance Creative

Much like in the period around 2005, where people grew weary of CGI imagery—audiences found it difficult to connect with the character and personality that CGI attempted to replicate.

Audiences are once again appreciating the craft of design and illustration, and its ability to tell stories and express culture. In the same way people rediscovered the skill and character in great carpentry versus the mass produced. In an web article from digital agency, Calm Digital, they describe it as “...a conscious decision to breathe humanity, personality, and the artist's touch into designs...”.

In branding and design, consultancies have, historically created standardised Illustration systems that can be easily replicable or commissioned by a particular illustrator or designer.

In 2025 we will experience a more human art-scape from creatives who will create ever more expressive, complex illustration systems for brands that are more hand-drawn or imperfect and embrace new levels of creativity and of course a more experimental use of AI across experiences.

Media is awash with AI imagery and people are bored of the polished nature and similarities that share this recent generative landfill of meh!

This year, companies using generative imagery in the public realm and online will be perceived as poor value, cheap, untrustworthy or fake... as online trust becomes more fragile, many organisations will want to move away from their customers perceiving them in this way.

Fortunately, AI has not yet commercialised the beauty of imperfections and the creativity, craft and artistic expression that humans are capable of.

At Busa Woodward we've been embracing and fighting the onslaught of AI generated imagery. Partner, Mark was among the early group of testers for OpenAI's Dalle:2 in early 2022, including exploring the chat features that later became ChatGPT.

Images: Dalle:2 / Mark Woodward, March 2022





Trend 3:

Rebooting Digital Honesty

The digital trust dilemma

Rebooting Digital Honesty

Digital trust has become a fragile commodity. Fake reviews are a growing issue, now exacerbated by the rapid scalability of AI. In 2022, TripAdvisor identified 1.3 million fake reviews, while TrustPilot removed 2.7 million the year before.

These staggering numbers highlight the scale of the problem and its impact on consumers' ability to rely on what they read online.

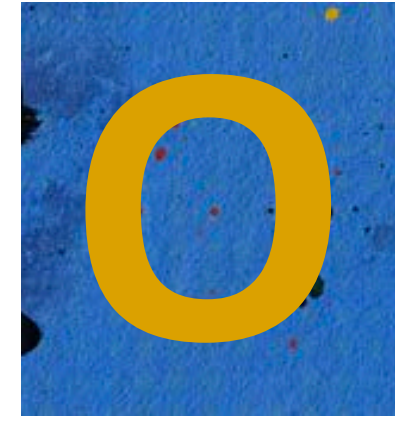
Transparency, verifiable claims, and endorsements from trusted sources could become vital tools in this fight for credibility.

Even content created with harmless intent, such as AI-generated summaries or product descriptions make it harder for people to discern what is genuine.



Generative Double-Edged Sword

Rebooting Digital Honesty



rganisations producing digital content are churning out material at unprecedented speeds. But, many fail to ask: *Do people even want more content?* The answer may be no, particularly if this content sacrifices authenticity for volume.

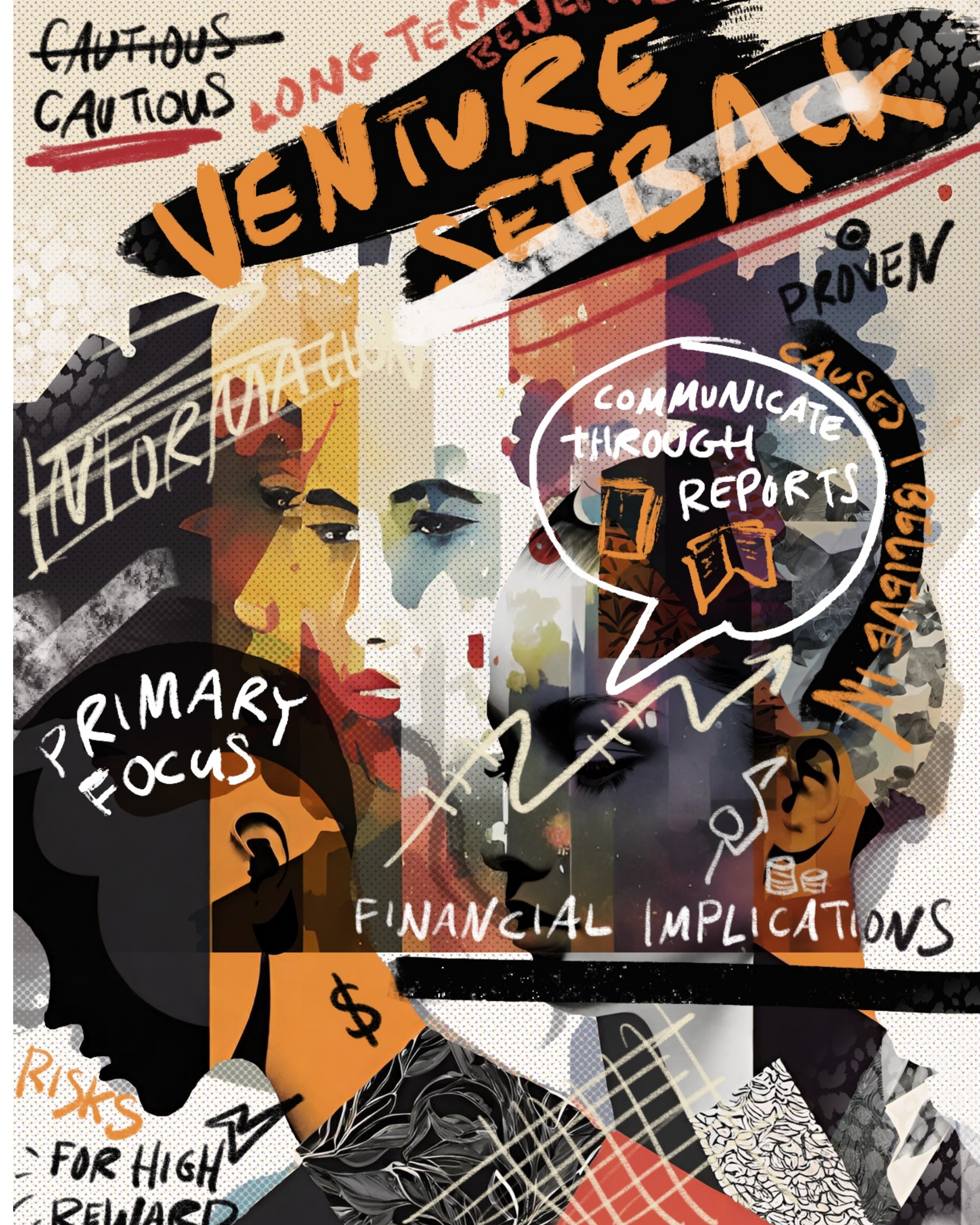
Generative AI is also being used to mislead consumers. From computer-generated images that misrepresent product quality to fake influencers promoting dubious goods, these advancements muddy the discovery experience, leaving consumers uncertain of what to believe.



More Eyeballs | Image: Mark Woodward

To rebuild online trust, brands and creators must strike a balance between leveraging new technologies and preserving the integrity of the content they share.

Consumers are growing weary of the endless streams of polished yet questionable information. The path forward lies in embracing transparency, accountability, and meaningful interactions that champion quality over quantity. Genuine, sincere, validatable and honest will be the qualities that separates trustworthy brands from the rest.



Rediscovering the hidden culture

Rebooting Digital Honesty

In 2025, the divide between the haves and have-nots extends far beyond luxury goods and private jets. It's now a matter of who gets to connect with a real person. The wealthy enjoy personal trainers, therapists, and wellness coaches—human touchpoints that cater to their every need.

For everyone else? Artificial intelligence is stepping in to fill the gap, offering chatbots for mental health, fitness apps for training plans, and virtual wellness advisors. But is this substitution good enough?

Imagine that interaction/frustration with your bank's tele-chatbot and those who have their own personal relationship managers direct number!

AI-powered personal care has its perks. Apps like BetterHelp provide affordable mental health support, while platforms like Peloton offer digital coaching accessible to millions.

These technologies are increasingly sophisticated, delivering personalised advice and feedback at a fraction of the cost of human professionals. Yet, the warmth and empathy of human interaction—the nuanced understanding that a machine simply cannot replicate—remains out of reach for many.

This reliance on AI raises profound questions about equity in care. Should meaningful human connection be a luxury item, reserved for those who can pay?

While AI democratises access to some degree, it risks creating a world where the less advantaged are relegated to robotic empathy and algorithmic attention. The rich not only get better care but also maintain the vital human connections that make personal care feel, well, personal.

The challenge for the future is clear: to ensure AI supplements rather than replaces human care, particularly for those who can't afford it.

Governments, organisations, and innovators must collaborate to make hybrid models—blending AI with real human touch—more accessible. Because everyone deserves not just care but connection, regardless of their bank balance. Let's ensure technology uplifts rather than deepens the divide.

Dark Patterns Deception

Rebooting Digital Honesty

Dark patterns—those sneaky design tricks that nudge us into making unintended choices—are everywhere. From apps that make canceling subscriptions a maze to shopping sites using fake urgency ("Only 2 left!"), companies are exploiting our instincts for convenience and fear of missing out.

Thankfully, pushback is growing. Regulators are stepping up, with the EU tightening rules on manipulative cookie banners and California enforcing stricter privacy laws.

While these tactics may seem minor, their cumulative impact is huge, causing wasted money, frustration, and eroding trust in the digital world.

Consumers are becoming savvier, demanding clear options and fair designs. Businesses that promote transparency and user trust—like offering simple opt-outs or honest communication—are not only staying compliant but also building loyalty.

Trends are emerging to combat dark patterns. Ethical design is now part of tech education, empowering designers to create user-first experiences. Tools like browser extensions and AI are exposing manipulative interfaces, giving users more control.

As awareness grows and technology advances, transparency and fairness are becoming essential. Companies embracing these values aren't just avoiding fines—they're leading the way to a more honest digital future.

A Fairer Digital Future

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This is the first of a regular series of reports where we apply critical insight from leading research and thought leaders and explore how they can be applied to experience design.

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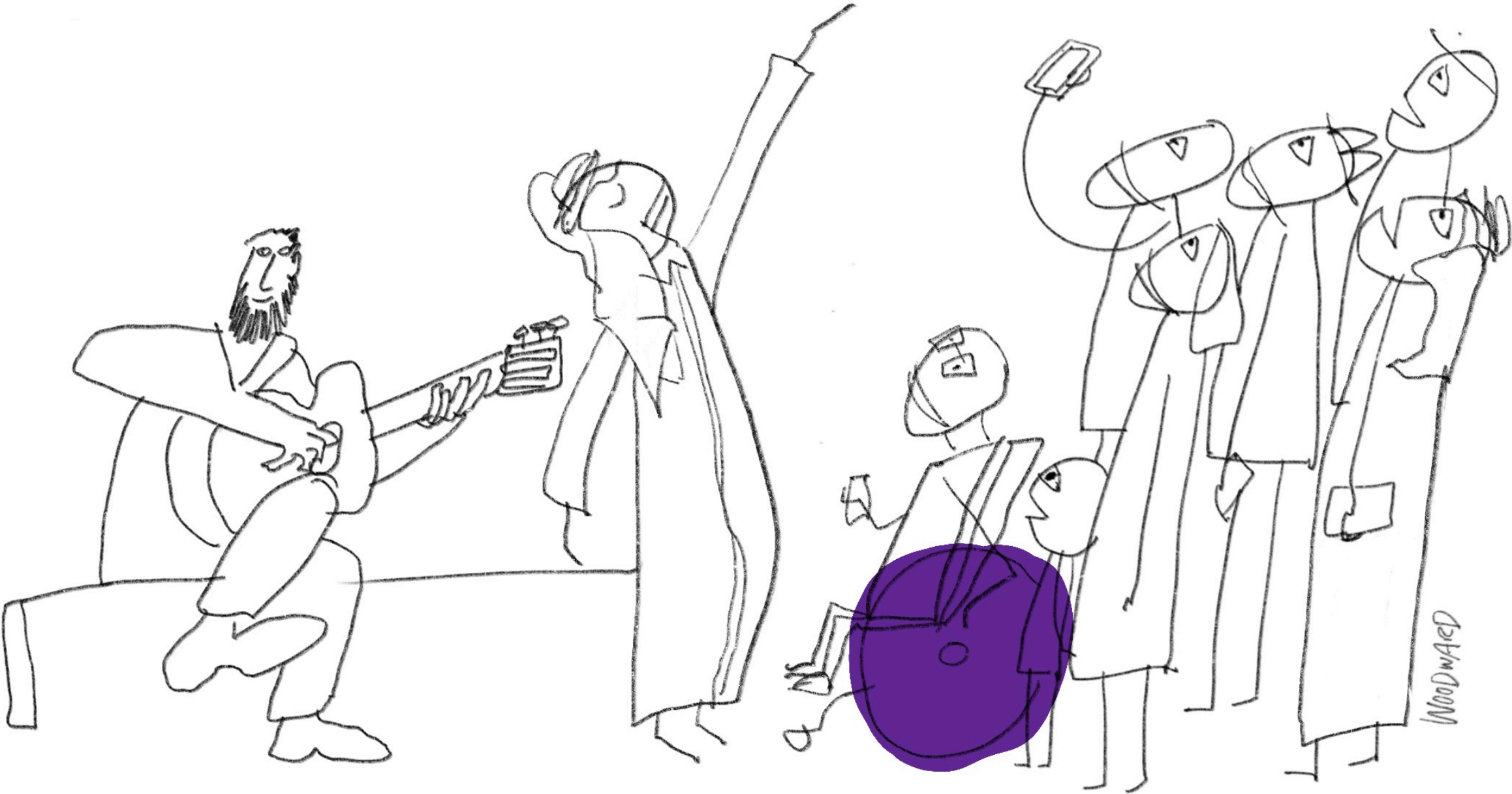
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