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Designing for experience: Exploring user-centered strategies in Selgascano's architecture

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Abstract

The production of space is a multidimensional and complex process that encompasses emotion, knowledge, intuition, foresight, and experience. When designing, architects consider interpersonal interactions and human-space relationships to create scenes suitable for the anticipated actions and experiences within a space. People, in turn, are the ones who experience spaces. Many researchers and architects focus on human-space interaction in architecture. Among these architects, the SelgasCano architecture office, founded in 1998 by Jose Selgas and Lucia Cano, places user experience at the center of its designs, aiming to create spaces that are not only functional but also places that users embrace and enjoy. Within this scope, the literature on human–space interaction was reviewed, and four key themes related to user experience in SelgasCano's architectural approach were identified. Four projects in which SelgasCano was considered to reflect these themes most clearly (Silicon House, SelgasCano Architecture Office, Second Home London Office, and Second Home Hollywood Office) were examined. The study reveals that SelgasCano systematically integrates context, biophilia, material, and color as core design components that frame and enrich user experience across their architectural projects. The findings reveal that SelgasCano's architecture positions user experience at the core of the design process, integrating sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions to create dynamic and engaging environments. The study concludes that user-centered and biophilic design strategies significantly contribute to enhancing spatial quality and human–space interaction. In this regard, examining and further developing design approaches that prioritize user experience is of critical importance for generating innovative and human-centered solutions in architectural practice.

Keywords: user experience, SelgasCano, context, biophilia, material, color

1. Introduction

From the views of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard, and many contemporary authors, an experiential approach based on personal experiences in spaces can be read (Pallasmaa, 2018). Within this framework, the subject-object relationship is critically examined, emphasizing how individuals perceive, interpret, and engage with their surrounding environments. When the subject-object relationship is adapted to architecture, it is seen that studies are interpreted in a way that considers human-space interaction. The field is developed under the title of Environmental-Behavior Studies in architecture. The famous architect Rapoport, who worked on Environmental-Behavior Studies, states that all human-made environments contain human decisions; space is produced in such a way that relates people to other people and spaces (Rapoport, 1980, p. 10-11).

Buildings are scenes designed by taking into account the actions and experiences anticipated to take place within space. Individuals engage with these spaces through sensory perception, movement, and cognitive interpretation, which together shape their overall experience of the built environment. Action and experience occurring in space are in an inseparable relationship (Itterson et al., 1976). The built environment influences human thoughts and emotions (Rui & Firzan, 2024). Architectural experience, on the other hand, is the interpretation of aesthetic, social, environmental, or functional qualities by the inhabitant as a subject, within their own cultural

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context and in a real time and space (Coelho, 2013). In a built environment, the experience of architecture is always individual and unique. Architecture comes into being with the meaning a person attributes to space. Otherwise, only the physical structure of environments can be spoken of. The artistic and mental essence of architecture emerges through individual experience (Pallasmaa, 2018). As can be understood, space cannot be reduced merely to a physical form, but gains meaning through the relationships established within it. The production of space is an act so complex that it encompasses emotion, knowledge, intuition, foresight, and experience, and cannot be clearly defined.

The space-human relationship has been taken into consideration by many architects from past to present, who incorporated user experience into both their discourses and works. For example, Peter Zumthor emphasized that architecture has its own reality that establishes a relationship with life (Zumthor, 1988, p. 1). Bernard Tschumi, on the other hand, claimed that the potential for unexpected actions to occur in space depends on the movements of users (Tschumi, 2000, p. 13, 226, 297). According to him, architectural space is constantly transformed by the events (user movements and resulting actions) that occur within and around it (Tschumi, 1994). This study aims to present an original approach that evaluates SelgasCano's architectural practice from different perspectives of user experience. The main research question of this study is to explore how user experience is shaped within the architectural practice of SelgasCano and through which conceptual and design components it is articulated. Accordingly, the study seeks to analyze the outcomes of SelgasCano's user-oriented approach within a conceptual framework. Within this scope, the literature on human–space interaction was examined, and four key themes related to user experience in SelgasCano's architectural approach were identified: context, biophilia, material, and color. Four buildings (Silicon House, SelgasCano Architecture Office, Second Home London Office, and Second Home Hollywood Office) considered to best reflect these themes were analyzed. The findings were evaluated through these four main themes, revealing how the architects approach user experience. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that user-centered design is not limited to physical form and functional arrangements but is also shaped by the ways in which spaces are perceived and experienced by their users.

2. Method

In this study, recent literature on human–space interaction was primarily reviewed. The architectural works of the firm SelgasCano, which constitute the focus of the study, were examined, and it was observed that context, biophilia, material, and color themes predominate in the firm's design approach to user experience. Accordingly, an additional literature review was conducted based on these themes to ensure a clear understanding and presentation of the conceptual framework.

In the case study section, which forms the original contribution of the research, Silicon House (2006), SelgasCano Architecture Office (2007), Second Home London Office (2014), and Second Home Hollywood Office (2019), four projects by SelgasCano, were selected as the sample, as they most clearly reflect the identified themes. The analysis of the architectural components shaping user experience in each building employed the four main themes (context, biophilia, material, and color) as the analytical framework. The findings were interpreted through a comparative analysis of visual and textual documents, and the architects' approaches to user experience were evaluated through these themes.

This study is limited to SelgasCano's projects in which the emphasis on user experience is explicitly expressed. The analysis is based on subjective interpretation and does not include user feedback or measurable performance assessments.

3. Literature Review: Exploring User Experience in SelgasCano's Architecture

To better understand how SelgasCano interprets user experience in their architectural practice, it is necessary to examine the firm's general design philosophy and approach to space. Founded in

1998 by José Selgas and Lucía Cano, the office frequently emphasizes its commitment to user-centered and experiential design principles:

- "We believe that human experience is the heart of architecture, and if we can bring people closer to each other and to nature, we can create better spaces for daily life" (Baldwin, 2019),
- "Architecture is about human experience" (Baldwin, 2019),
- "Architecture serves to solve problems and to make people feel better" (Domus, 2015),
- "We love designing for people" (Domus, 2015),
- "Our architecture is produced by reading the places and the lives of those who will live there" (Domus, 2015).

In an interview, SelgasCano stated that what makes their projects successful is that people enjoy using the building and make it a place of their own (SelgasCano, 2015). They expressed that environmental elements such as nature, context, climate, and history are among the main factors they take into account when creating an architectural product (SelgasCano, 2015). They further emphasized the importance of minimizing interventions on the construction site to preserve the integrity of the existing environment. Appropriate use of scale, efficient spending of the budget, and sustainability in transportation, manufacturing, and energy are among their design principles (Mundelsalle, 2019). Their simple forms, light materials, and transparency can be observed in their works as a product of the "less is more" understanding. Biophilia and the experience of color are among their priorities.

3.1. Themes Used by SelgasCano in User-Centered Design

3.1.1. Context in User Experience

Context is a concept with extensive literature in the field of design (Johnson, 1994). As it establishes a dialogue between new interventions and existing conditions, it inherently embodies a historicist perspective, emphasizing the continuity and integration of architectural elements across time. Therefore, it has a structure that sets standards, emphasizes rules, and is concrete and defensible. With its physical aspect, which mostly concerns the harmony of scale, proportion, ornamentation, color, material, and construction technique with the environment, it falls within the area of interest of architects. It is a concept that points to the physical texture of the environment in which the building is situated, as well as its social, cultural, and historical values (Johnson, 1994, p. 285-287). Moreover, context encompasses sociological dimensions, highlighting the ways in which architectural interventions interact with and influence the broader community. When context is addressed, in approaches that disregard the social values of the environment and focus on the physical dimensions of architectural space and form, the behavioral and experiential patterns that give meaning to buildings are in danger of being neglected (Sime, 1986). In this case, practices based on experience will not be included; as Auge points out, architecture will emerge where context, identity, and belonging are not utilized, and the relationship between place and human will be reorganized according to the new world. As a result, spaces that have no relationship with place and context, that encourage behaviors targeting consumption, that are suitable for rapid use, and that hinder the development of belonging will begin to proliferate (Augé, 2016, p. 7-9, 21). In this case, it is possible to say that people will only be present in space without becoming part of the place they experience and thus will not inhabit it or develop their spatial experiences (Heidegger, 1996). These approaches show that being situated within a context is necessary both for design and for human nature.

3.1.2. Biophilia in User Experience

An important element of context is the ecological diversity it contains. According to Beery and Wolf-Watz (2014), the relationship between nature and environmental behaviors has recently attracted attention in scientific practices. These approaches, using terms such as affinity, biophilia, attachment, ecological self, identity, and sensitivity, define the human–nature relationship in

emotional, cognitive, and/or physical forms (Bragg, 1996; Chawla, 1999; Clayton, 2003; Davis et al., 2009; Kals et al., 1999; Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2009; Palmer, 1993; Schultz, 2001; Stedman, 2006; Sward & Marcinkowski, 2001; Wilson, 1984). In studies on nature and environmental behaviors, the emphasis is on the "experience" of nature, encounters with nature, and the possible emotional and/or cognitive relationships between nature and the individual that develop from these experiences. It is repeatedly assumed in these approaches that spending time in nature helps individuals see themselves as a part of nature, become more responsible for it, and ultimately contribute to its protection (Beery & Wolf-Watz, 2014).

According to Norberg-Schulz (1979), by addressing the interaction between nature and humans from a different perspective, human-made places are related to nature in three fundamental ways. First, it is based on the human desire to visualize his "understanding" of nature. To achieve this, one either constructs what is seen, or creates a work in areas where nature is "centralized" or marks a place. Second, nature is completed by adding the human being into it. Finally, it symbolizes the understanding of nature. For example, an element belonging to nature is reflected in a building that manifests it.

Designs inspired by nature have found their place throughout history in many fields, including industrial design, healthcare, medicine, materials science, nanotechnology, robotics, and engineering. The discipline of architecture also aims to contribute to the literature and develop new design solutions by approaching this subject from different perspectives. Understanding and analyzing nature by examining its forms, systems, materials, functions, processes, aesthetics, and ecosystems to discover new possibilities and solutions for related disciplines has become increasingly essential in contemporary architectural practice (Kahvecioğlu et al., 2024). According to Wijesooriya et al. (2025), the biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans have an innate affinity toward nature and natural systems (Wilson, 1984). The biophilic design approach pioneered by Stephen Kellert also aims to provide various psychological, behavioral, health, and well-being benefits by strengthening the human–nature connection. With biophilic design, elements of nature and the natural world are integrated into the built environment. It encompasses efforts in architecture and environmental psychology to produce healthier and more sustainable living spaces (Khanzadeh, 2024). In biophilic design, strategies that enable direct interaction with nature and the indirect simulation of nature through materials and design motifs support relaxation and a sense of belonging through organic forms, natural tones, and textures. Ecological materials, in turn, enhance emotional and sensory experience by emitting subtle natural scents (Ashour et al., 2025).

Research has shown that biophilic design provides psychological benefits such as stress reduction, improved attention, decreased anxiety, and enhanced mood. These effects can be recreated in interior spaces through the use of natural textures, colors, and materials such as wood, stone, and organic fibers. Such ecological materials offer sensory stimuli that reduce mental fatigue and increase awareness, effectively simulating the calming influence of nature (Ashour et al., 2025). Past studies have proven that experiences of nature reduce stress and facilitate recovery from mental fatigue (Hong et al., 2025), enhance users' cognitive performance, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being (Khanzadeh, 2024).

The understanding and application of natural formation and production processes are leading to revolutionary developments in architecture. Emerging through the collaboration of biology, architecture, and technology, these advancements hold the potential to bring significant changes to human life in the future. Interdisciplinary experts are conducting research in this field and developing theories that drive a paradigm shift in architectural thinking (Mutlu Avinç & Arslan Selçuk, 2019).

3.1.3. Material in User Experience

Comments on architectural form develop in line with the perception and evaluation criteria of the person observing the architectural work and are therefore important in both theoretical studies and practice (Jenks, 1997; Mozaikçi, 2010). The idea that the architect wants to convey to the user

is displayed through form. In architecture, the selection of materials is highly important, as it influences not only the appearance but also the character and experience of the built environment (Erdinç, 2023). The material and form that make up the architectural form have a decisive impact on the comprehension of the building (Mozaikçi, 2010).

The selection of appropriate building materials is a critical decision that influences multiple aspects of a project, including structural integrity, cost efficiency, aesthetics, health, and functionality (Makinde et al., 2024). While architects assess performance characteristics such as durability or compressive strength, they also consider sensory and experiential factors such as color and texture (Wastiels & Wouters, 2012). Research has shown that material properties such as color, brightness, and texture, affect visual experience, spatial perception, and emotional responses. Materials like wood and red brick promote relaxation, positive emotions, and creativity by stimulating the sympathetic nervous system, thereby creating a warm and natural atmosphere. In contrast, materials such as concrete and white paint enhance cognitive functions, improving attention and concentration (Zhou et al., 2025). Traditional sustainable materials such as bamboo, adobe, rammed earth, untreated wood, stone, clay, wool, and cork offer sensory experiences that foster calmness, clarity, and emotional resilience. Natural textures, earthy tones, and organic patterns encourage relaxation, while tactile experiences evoke deep psychological associations with nature, stability, and authenticity. When combined with natural light, vegetation, good ventilation, and acoustic comfort, these materials help reduce stress and promote mental well-being (Ashour et al., 2025).

Consequently, designers develop their projects not solely with considerations of function and utility in mind, but also to shape and enhance the experiential engagement of users with the space. Thus, choosing materials is not only about meeting technical requirements. It also involves elements concerning user experience or sensory stimulation such as the color or texture of the material (Wastiels & Wouters, 2009).

3.1.4. Color in User Experience

Color is a fundamental sensory perception and a key visual element that organizes space (Hong et al., 2025). It carries symbolic, associative, synesthetic, and emotional connotations, playing a critical role in shaping the user's overall impression of an environment (Mahnke, 2004). In architectural practice, color is not merely a surface treatment or decorative layer; it plays a decisive role in how space is perceived, understood, and experienced (Pinto & Fidalgo, 2025). Color is employed to emphasize the character of a building, to promote visual unity and harmony (Radwan, 2015), and to enhance the recognizability and identity of the structure. People's emotional and cognitive responses to a space can vary according to the colors used in its elements. Along with color, the functions and overall quality of the space also affect their experience. As a result, people may develop certain biases based on how they assume a place should be used. This shows the importance of creating design strategies that consider the specific qualities of each space (Noraslı, 2024).

Environmental psychology research has shown that different colors evoke distinct emotional responses. Warm colors (red, orange, yellow) create a sense of energy, warmth, and stimulation, though excessive use may cause discomfort. Cool colors (blue, green, purple) promote calmness, relaxation, and concentration, making them ideal for workplaces and healthcare environments. Neutral tones (white, gray, earth tones) provide balance and harmony and are often used to create timeless and elegant atmospheres. In addition, light or cool hues can make spaces feel more open and expansive, while dark or saturated tones can evoke a sense of enclosure, intimacy, or monumentality. Contrasting colors may be used to define circulation paths, emphasize entrances or focal points, and facilitate intuitive wayfinding. Understanding these psychological effects enables architects to make informed decisions when selecting colors for different building types, enhancing both functionality and user experience (Pinto & Fidalgo, 2025).

Colors, in addition to supporting the functions of buildings and urban spaces, can also carry symbolic, cultural, artistic, and aesthetic meanings. Color schemes planned according to users' emotional needs enhance the vibrancy of a space, intensify specific emotional and aesthetic experiences, and highlight the character of the environment (Jaglarz, 2023). However, it should be remembered that color perception may be influenced by physiological, cultural, age, gender, and other factors that create cognitive responses in users and affect their feelings and behaviors (Heller, 2017; Paschoarelli et al., 2024).

3.2. Case Studies on User Experience in SelgasCano's Architecture

In this study, examples are presented from the SelgasCano's buildings such as Silicon House (2006), SelgasCano Architecture Office (2007), Second Home London Office (2014), and Second Home Hollywood Office (2019) where the use of context, biophilia, material, and color are predominantly observed. Afterwards, it is discussed how the architects used these elements in the buildings as a tool to emphasize user experience.

3.2.1. Silicon House (2006)

Silicon House is located in an evergreen environment. The building is surrounded by oak, elm, acacia, prunus, and plane trees. It is said that the presence of Silicon House within a natural vegetation creates a contrast with nature (Figure 1). The house seeks to achieve harmony by opposing nature (ArchDaily, 2013). According to the designers, the building is "a design that departs from nature, occurring in a void left for them by nature, a void that only architecture can fill." Although it does not claim to be an organic structure, it is a house that respects nature and touches the natural landscape as little as possible. In another sense, it can be defined as an interface space reproduced within nature (Arkitektuel, n.d.).

Figure 1 Silicon House (Iwan, n.d.d)

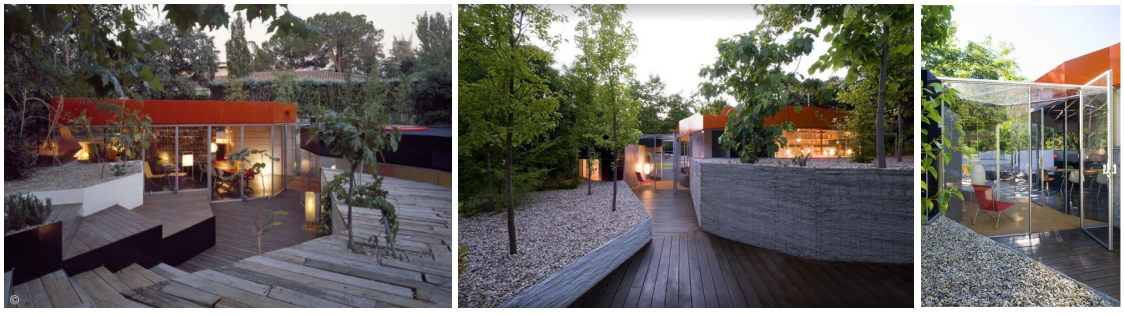

Figure 2 Silicon House's facades (ArchDaily, 2013)

The building reinforces the contrast it creates in a natural setting by vivid pastel colors. With its orange, white, light green, light blue, and navy tones, the building easily distinguishes itself from the exterior (Figure 2). Similarly, in the interior, red, yellow, orange, navy, and white colors are observed both in the use of furniture and in emphasizing the structural system of the building. The extensive use of glass in the building also allows the natural environment to be observed from the inside and enables the view of the contrast outside (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Silicon House's interiors (Iwan, n.d.d)

3.2.2. SelgasCano Architecture Office (2007)

The SelgasCano Architecture Office is one of the office buildings that provides a direct experience with nature. It is partially described as an aerodynamic tube embedded in the ground (Callaghan, 2015).

As an example of biophilic design, the linearly organized structure merges with the forested natural area through its transparent north façade (Figure 4). The transparent façade also allows the building to avoid the use of artificial lighting during the day. Natural ventilation is achieved through operable windows (Callaghan, 2015). Part of the façade is covered with an opaque material of fiberglass and polyester, which provides solar protection for the building.

Figure 4 SelgasCano Architecture Office (Iwan, n.d.c)

The building, situated in nature, was constructed without harming the trees in the forest. This has allowed users to interact with the animals and plants in the area (Callaghan, 2015). The work desks aligned with the transparent north façade of the building, along with a portion of the roof continuing with translucent elements, enable employees to experience nature both at eye level and when looking up at the sky (Figure 5). Thus, seasonal transitions in the forest, wildlife, and the landscape are incorporated into users' daily lives (Inhabitat, n.d.).

Figure 5 Selgascano Architecture Office and green space relationship (Selgas & Cano, 2011)

The vivid color preference observed in SelgasCano's works is also reflected in their own design office. Amid the dominant green and brown tones of nature, the building stands out with its white structural frame. In the interior spaces, they mostly employ a contrast between yellow, green, and white. The use of red and orange in the selected furniture further supports the designed colorful environment (Figure 6).

Figure 6 SelgasCano Architecture Office's interiors (Selgas & Cano, 2011; Iwan, n.d.c)

3.2.3. Second Home London Office (2014)

Second Home London Office is a shared workspace that accommodates approximately 30 companies. On the ground floors, there are meeting rooms, lounges, a café-bar, and spaces allocated for social activities such as yoga, pilates, concerts, parties, and film screenings (ArchDaily, 2015). The offices are spread over two floors on each façade of the building. In the offices, small working areas have been created with glass partitions arranged for four to five people (Figure 7). Sound insulation has been meticulously addressed in each office (Dezeen, 2014). For this reason, partition elements and furniture have mostly been made of materials with sound-absorbing properties such as plastic, acrylic, and drywall. The finishes have been completed with materials such as corrugated walls, epoxy paint, Oregon pine, wool carpet, and wood wool. The structural system of the building is composite, consisting of reinforced concrete and various frames (Divisare, n.d.).

SelgasCano stated that their clients wanted a very bright design (Architect Magazine, n.d.). This request was interpreted by SelgasCano mainly as a yellow floor, gray floor, orange furnishings, glass and flooring, white walls, and structural elements. Attention was intended to be drawn through interior furniture that creates similarity with one another.

Figure 7 Second Home London Office's interiors (Iwan, n.d.b)

Figure 8 Second Home London Office: The relationship between the building and the city (Iwan, n.d.b)

The building is located in the city center, in an environment without a direct relationship with nature (Figure 8). This situation led SelgasCano to design its own greenery. With the placement of 800 plants inside the building (Figure 9), it was aimed to create a place where users could be happier, more creative, and more productive (Dezeen, 2017). To heal unhealthy plants, a "plant hospital" was positioned in the courtyard (Dezeen, 2014).

After the design was completed, SelgasCano added a terrace to the roof of the building. The terrace features organically shaped seating areas and water pools filled with aquatic plants. In this design, it can be observed that a reflection of an element from nature was added to the building (Figure 10).

Figure 9 Green elements in the Second Home London Office interior (Dezeen, 2017; Iwan, n.d.b)

Figure 10 Second Home London Office terrace (Dezeen, 2017)

Second Home London Office was the subject of an article in The Guardian titled "Second Home review: a good day at the Office" (Moore, 2014). In the article, the environment that the building offers to its employees was presented as a successful spatial arrangement. By incorporating nature themes, it not only provides users with a calming and productivity-enhancing environment but also, with the spaces dedicated to social activities offered by the building, enables employees to use it not only for work but also for social interaction. With these qualities, the building is regarded as "a bold and admirable experiment in how creative arrangements in the spatial organization of small innovative businesses can influence commercial outcomes" (The Architectural Review, 2014).

3.2.4. Second Home Hollywood Office (2019)

Having previously worked with Second Home in London and Lisbon, SelgasCano transformed a former Hollywood parking lot into a campus hosting 250 companies (Dezeen, 2019c), consisting of 60 single-story oval units (Dezeen, 2019b) (Figure 11). The project was established on the site of the old Anne Banning Community House, completed in the 1960s and renovated for the project, as well as a former parking lot (Dezeen, 2019a). The existing building contains shared facilities such as offices, a café, a bar, a restaurant, spaces for events and conferences, lounges, and open terraces (ArchDaily, 2019). Circulation between the units takes place through landscaped winding pathways. The terraces defined in these outdoor areas encourage companies to socialize and employees to interact (Dezeen, 2019a). In addition to the offices within the campus, it also hosts cultural events. Local charities and neighborhood groups are able to use the campus's meeting rooms free of charge (Dezeen, 2019b). Second Home, in collaboration with the Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC), has opened the campus to public use (Dezeen, 2019c).

Supporting their statement that "Our most creative work comes not so much from conflicting human geometries, but from natural forms and organic shapes" (Dezeen, 2019a), SelgasCano arranged the 60 units in the Second Home Hollywood Office with transparent curved walls to provide visual access to the outdoors. Among the units, they created an urban area with 6,500 plants and trees. The selected green elements consist of plants that require low amounts of water

(Dezeen, 2019a). In the design of the Second Home Hollywood Office, the rich sensory stimuli of nature are emphasized with trees, plants, and grasses moving with the breeze. The office space aims to establish a strong connection with natural processes and seasonal changes, offering users an environmentally harmonious experience (Figure 12).

Figure 11 Second Home Hollywood Office (Iwan, n.d.a)

Figure 12 Second Home Hollywood Office and green usage (Iwan, n.d.a)

Figure 13 Second Home Hollywood Office's interiors (Iwan, n.d.a)

The building's glass ceilings and windows create changing densities of light and shadow over time with daylight coming from multiple angles, while the diffuse lighting used on the walls and ceilings imitate the natural environment. Large windows, open-plan offices, and transparent partitions enhance the spaciousness of the space by providing uninterrupted sightlines. Verandas and tree canopies offer shelters that reinforce feelings of protection and rest. Since the pedestrian paths inside the office are designed in zigzag shapes surrounded by trees and plants, they add a sense of mystery and discovery to the space (Mutlu Avinç, 2024). Regarding the colors used in the building, an intensive use of yellow can be observed on the roof and the floor (Figure 13). In the interior furniture, dark red and orange textiles on desks and chairs stand out (Dezeen, 2019a). There are opinions that SelgasCano's design of Second Home Hollywood is an experiment on how the average office worker interacts with natural elements (ArchDaily, 2019).

4. Discussion of SelgasCano's User-Centered Approach

In this study, SelgasCano's works are examined through selected examples. Table 1 serves as an analytical framework that compares how the context, biophilia, material, and color shape user experience across the selected projects. These four themes, derived from the literature review, form the analytical framework used to evaluate the selected architectural projects. Each theme

represents a distinct dimension of user experience, addressing the relationship between spatial perception, emotional engagement, and environmental interaction. The discussion that follows interprets how the four conceptual themes presented in Table 1 are reflected in the selected projects and contribute to the understanding of user experience.

Table 1 Interpretation of SelgasCano's Structures in Terms of User Experience

Building		Context	Biophilia	Material and Color	User Experience
Silicon House (2006)		Creating contrast with the context to ensure that the structure is distinguished from the surroundings.	Building in an area where nature is central. Transforming the natural environment within the context into an object of spectacle.	Separation from the environment through the use of materials and colors. Emphasis on structure.	The user experiences the overwhelming contrast the architect has created between the natural and the artificial.
SelgasCano Architecture Office (2007)		Placement in context.	Completing nature by adding humans to it. Transforming nature into an object of spectacle.	Emphasis on connection through extensive use of glass. Representation of artificiality through smooth and colorful surfaces.	Benefit from the relaxing and productivity-boosting effects of working in nature. Feeling like a part of nature.
Second Home London Office (2014)		Creating contrast with the context to ensure that the structure is distinguished from the surroundings.	Creating a reflection of nature by adding a natural element to an interior space, independent of its context. Imitation of nature.	The use of dominant colors detaches from its context. The representation of artificiality through smooth and colorful surfaces.	Aiming to create a living space for employees. Increasing social interaction.
Second Home Hollywood Office (2019)		Creating context for the building.	Creating a reflection of nature by selectively adding a natural element independent of its context but according to its qualities that will adapt to the region.	The emphasis on context created by the extensive use of glass. The representation of artificiality through smooth and colorful surfaces.	Aiming to create a living space for employees. Increasing social interaction. Benefiting from the relaxing and productivity-boosting effects of working in nature.

In Silicon House (2006), it is observed that SelgasCano intervened in the natural void where the building is situated with colors that contradict nature and attempted to cover this intervention by using wood flooring, a material belonging to nature, on the ground. Seasonal transitions can be traced through the fallen leaves on this flooring, a man-made surface, via the wide transparent surfaces. It can be said that the architects created irony at this point. When the user observes the outside, rather than the natural environment itself, they watch the remains of nature within an artificial setting. The painting of the building's structural system in the interior can be read as an emphasis that the environment in which one is situated is man-made. Since epoxy coatings and plastic furniture offer the user a smooth experience that does not actually exist in nature, they can be seen as reinforcing the contrast between the natural and the artificial.

Looking at the design of SelgasCano Architecture Office (2007), it can be said that SelgasCano was an employer aware of the relationship between the connection to nature and work efficiency.

Here, users are provided with direct, immersive experiences of natural elements, reinforcing both well-being and productivity within the workspace. The building's very minimal intervention to the environment allows a pure observation of the natural setting. The completely transparent façade and the partially transparent roof eliminate the separation between inside and outside. Through these openings, the entire timeline of nature can easily be observed. The use of color, on the other hand, can be seen as a choice that adds dynamism to this simple design and revitalizes the employees. Through their selection of materials and colors, the architects create a contrast with nature, reminding users that the building is an interface between the natural and the artificial, and that the surrounding environment is man-made.

Second Home London Office (2014) can be seen as a design that aims to create a living space for employees, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to the place. Given its central urban location, the building's connection to nature is expressed primarily through representational or imitative elements rather than direct interaction with natural surroundings. Many plants have been placed inside the building as elements of display in a context to which they do not belong, and an artificial pond has been created on the roof. Thus, nature has been reduced to an ornamental object. The use of color within the building creates a dynamic appearance in the space, ensuring that the building stands out. The orange tube located at the entrance caused the building to easily separate from its context. If this orange glass tube, symbolizing artificiality, and the incorporation of green elements into the building's interior using materials are interpreted as stemming from a longing for nature, then it can be discussed as a contradiction.

The inclusion of diverse uses and the presence of terraces open to employees in Second Home Hollywood Office (2019), similar to the building designed by SelgasCano for Second Home in London, can be considered as a practice aimed at increasing employees' connection to the place and thereby enhancing work efficiency. The fact that these areas are also open to the public is regarded as significant in ensuring that the intended user experiences in the space are not limited only to employees. Although the green environment created in the complex is organized with elements introduced by human intervention and not originally present there, the decision to use context-specific plants in the open spaces can be seen as one that has managed to partially reduce the sense of artificiality. However, the pastel colors and use of plastic in the space are thought to create a contradiction with nature, reminding users like other works that they are situated in a man-made environment.

As understood from the analysis, in SelgasCano's designs, context is used as a tool to create contrast with the ground so that the building attracts attention, utilized as an element that enriches the design by making use of its existing conditions, or alternatively, the building is placed within a new context created by the architects themselves. These different uses hinder making a definitive interpretation regarding SelgasCano's approach to context. However, in each case, the relationship established between context–building–user draws attention to the sociological dimension of context. The variability in the architects' interpretation of context also leaves debatable whether the building is a place that is inhabited and enables the development of spatial experiences, or whether it is a place that provides space for behaviors that target consumption. In the use of biophilia, SelgasCano refers to the three themes indicated by Norberg-Schulz: the human desire to visualize their "understanding" of nature, the aspiration to construct a work in areas where nature is "centralized" or points to a place, and the act of embedding the human into nature and symbolizing it. In each type of use, they emphasize the experience of nature and the cognitive relationship between nature and humans. They seek answers to the questions: How can nature be incorporated into design? How do people experience elements belonging to nature?

SelgasCano, on the other hand, employs material and color as tools that provide sensory stimulation for users and create impressions of the space. In this context, striking colors, surfaces with a smoothness not found in nature, and large transparent openings are indispensable elements in their works, serving to increase both the visibility of the building and the perception of its surroundings.

In summary, the comparative analysis demonstrates that SelgasCano's architectural works consistently prioritize user experience through an integration of contextual sensitivity, biophilic elements, material expression, and color dynamics. Each of these themes contributes to creating environments that are not only visually engaging but also emotionally and cognitively stimulating for users.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how user experience is interpreted in the architectural works of SelgasCano, focusing on the conceptual themes of context, biophilia, material, and color. Using a qualitative case study approach, four selected projects were analyzed to reveal how these design elements shape spatial perception and emotional engagement. The findings demonstrate that SelgasCano integrates sensory and experiential dimensions as core aspects of architectural design, offering a distinctive user-centered approach. Thus, the study has achieved its objective by revealing that user experience lies at the core of SelgasCano's architectural design process and by presenting an original approach to the experiential dimension of architecture.

From SelgasCano's style, it can be said that through the use of elements such as context, biophilia, material, and color, they aim to create touches that enrich people's daily lives, make them feel better, and ensure that they enjoy using the building. It is observed that SelgasCano's user-experience-oriented design approach makes significant contributions to enhancing spatial quality and strengthening human–space interaction within the discipline of architecture. However, user experience is a subject too deep, complex, and multi-component to be limited to these headings. The examination and development of design approaches centered on user experience are critically important for producing innovative and human-centered solutions in architectural practice. Understanding SelgasCano's interpretation may contribute to deepening a design approach that strengthens the emotional and physical bonds users establish with buildings.

This study contributes to treating user experience as a conceptual tool in architectural design. It provides significant practical insights into how an approach centered on user experience can be developed within the architectural design process. First, findings derived from SelgasCano's projects demonstrate that design decisions can be shaped not only at the formal or functional level but also through the ways users perceive, feel, and appropriate the space. This approach allows for a reconsideration of the criteria for experience-based design in architectural practice. The study also exemplifies how four conceptual themes can be employed as tools to enrich user experience. However, the scope of the study is limited to a specific architectural office. Since the review relies on qualitative evaluation, no direct user data on experiences (surveys, observations, interviews, etc.) were collected. The findings are based on the analysis of existing visual and textual documents; therefore, the results are interpretive in nature. Moreover, the selected themes (context, biophilia, materiality, color) represent specific dimensions of user experience. Other physical and social qualities of space could open different points of assessment in future studies. Comparative analyses involving different architects or offices could provide new depth to user experience–oriented architectural research. Future studies could also support user experiences in spaces with empirical methods such as surveys, observations, or interviews.

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CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Sena Işıklar Bengi: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Data visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declare that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee permission is not required.

Resume

Dr. Sena Işıklar Bengi is a dedicated academic in the field of architecture a focus on user-centered design, urban design, post-occupancy evaluation and architectural education. She is currently working at Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University, where she contributes to architectural education and research. With over ten years of teaching experience, she has been involved in a wide range of courses and scholarly projects. Her research explores the relationship between space and human behavior, aiming to enhance spatial quality through evidence-based design.