



CREATIVE BY NATURE

BY BOB KODZIS

After dozens of interviews and years of research in the quest for creative inspiration, I have finally found the single greatest source of creative genius on the planet. It's the holy grail of creativity; so powerful that it has inspired and humbled the most brilliant minds in history. It's a wellspring of creative inspiration so enormous that it will never stop inspiring new ideas.

Meet Mother Nature, the ultimate creative muse and design maven. Her flora, fauna and vistas have inspired artists and poets for centuries. She is a master art director and an ingenious engineer who has had the benefit of billions of years to refine her craft. It's tough to argue with her sense of composition, her use of color and the intelligence of her designs.

It's time to unleash the power of nature in your creative work. After reading this article you may want to sign up for a subscription to *National Geographic*...

THE ART OF NATURE

"The richness I achieve comes from nature; the source of my inspiration." – Claude Monet

Nature is both art and inspiration. It offers us millions of ideas that we can apply in billions of ways. We need only keep our minds open to all of the possibilities. Creative souls throughout history have looked to nature for inspiration more than to any other source. Masters like da Vinci, Monet, Van Gogh, and Klimt all point to nature as a primary source of creative juice. Rembrandt once advised a young art apprentice, "Choose only one master...Nature."

Even contemporary artists are making the nature connection. Larry Moore, the artist who recently earned the Society of Illustrators Gold Award, told me that he no longer looks to other creatives for inspiration: his primary personal muse is nature.

There's certainly no shortage of inspiration. Even in something as simple as a leaf, Mother Nature shows us an almost infinite number of variations on a theme. She shows how we can take the same structure and create a thousand original interpretations by changing the basic visual elements: color, shape and texture. Our tools are different (we use Photoshop – she uses photosynthesis), but the basic application is the same.

And, oh, the colors...Nature has already worked out millions of complimentary color schemes and fascinating patterns that are out there for the taking. There's a reason why the colors in nature seem to work together so well. Our concept of complementary colors is rooted in our natural frame of reference. After all, Mother Nature created the original color wheel – the rainbow.

"Keep your true love of nature, for that is the way to understand art more and more." – *Vincent Van Gogh*

Instead of randomly selecting the color scheme for your next project, why not borrow from work of the Mother of all designers?

Why not design your next logo in the colors of the stunning keel billed toucan or create a poster using the color palette of the Grand Canyon at sunset?

Imagine how impressed your client will be when you explain that the color scheme and patterns you chose for their new line of motorcycles came from a series of colorful venomous snakes because you know that their target market likes things that are fast, exciting and dangerous.

THE POWER OF THE METAPHOR

"Nature is a revelation of God; Art is a revelation of man." – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Using metaphors from nature can have a powerful effect on the impact of a creative pitch. This is largely because they draw upon a frame of reference that is very familiar to all humans, as co-inhabitants of this planet. We all know something about the mystical and magical workings of nature, and only the most jaded among us are not impressed by its brilliance. How better to show a client the intelligence

of your ideas than to show how they compare to those of the designer of the universe?

I've seen more than one creative director captivate a client with the power of a nature metaphor. While in the corporate world, I watched a

brilliant young creative effectively extend the deadline for the launch of a corporate image campaign by equating the launch to a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. "These things take time," he said, "You don't want to cut that cocoon open too soon or you may end up launching a half-baked caterpillar into the market. With a little more time we'll flutter into the market and take their breath away!" He wasn't just asking for more time; he was offering to give us wings and to transform us into something beautiful. As silly as it may sound, he got the extension he sought, and I later watched the V.P. repeat the metaphor to defend the delayed launch to the company's president.

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and they adopted a new way of approaching opportunities. Powerful stuff.

These are just a few of the billions of great nature metaphors just waiting to bolster and justify your creative ideas. Inspirational examples are all around us. You need only make the connections between your projects and the elements of nature that best reflect what you and your clients are trying to achieve.

SMART BY DESIGN

“What I see in Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility. This is a genuinely religious feeling that has nothing to do with mysticism.” – Albert Einstein

Nothing justifies a creative decision like a connection to the natural world.

I recently did a pitch to a very conservative company seeking to market to women suffering from substance abuse and eating disorders. The client made it clear that they did not want their ads to feature depressed and distraught looking women. I knew that this market wouldn't respond to ads featuring happy, smiling women, so we began the search for a good metaphor.

Once again, Mother Nature came through with flying colors. I found a beautiful photo of an oyster, half opened to reveal its perfect white pearl. The outside of the oyster was craggy, hard and ugly (the way these women perceive themselves and their lives). The pearl inside was luminous (the way we wanted them to see themselves and their potential.) This simple image from nature launched a whole series of ideas around the concept that inside every troubled woman was a spot of beauty and value waiting to be revealed. Life is hard. You are beautiful. The client loved it! To this day, one of the company's owners refers to me as the man who brought them great pearls of wisdom.

Another example comes from a former mentor and teacher, Steve Diedrich, who is now the national director of research at AAA. Diedrich used to teach corporate leaders how to think and act strategically by equating the process to the hunting patterns of a lioness on the Serengeti Plain. His three-step approach was called Scan, Focus, and Act. He described how a lioness scans an entire herd of zebras before moving a muscle. He pointed out how she focuses on one zebra that looks weak or slow and studies that zebra's motion. He showed them how she waits until the right moment and then springs into action with a singular purpose, almost always nabbing her prey. In that same instant, Diedrich taught them how to scan their markets for opportunity, focus on a few simple priorities and attack them with unparalleled ferocity. With this simple metaphor, I watched him improve the scattered thinking and performance of dozens of “act first, think later” managers. He kept it simple. He made it interesting and he related it to something they all understood. (Who hasn't seen this familiar scene on the Discovery Channel?) The proof is in the impact. They got the message

In recent years there has been an extraordinary wave of breakthroughs and innovations inspired by nature. Many of today's top scientists, engineers and innovators are using the tried and true principles of nature to solve their problems, enhance their products and improve our quality of life.

In her highly praised book “Biomimicry,” Janine M. Beynus points to dozens of incredible and profound examples of man taking some very insightful cues from nature; from analyzing how spiders produce a lightweight, waterproof fiber that is proportionally five times stronger than steel,

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to studying the signaling power of proteins to improve the efficiency of computer processing, to learning how electrons in a leaf cell can convert sunlight into fuel in a trillionth of a second. There are so many sources of innovation inspiration in nature...and they are all patent-free. Nike has made major strides in bioengineering their “Nike Free” line of running shoes. The company makes no secret of the fact that they look to nature to lead them in the evolution of their shoe designs. Their Nike Labs Web site (www.nikelabs.com) offers a beautifully conceived section called “Designed by Nature” which shows how they've taken nature's wisdom and applied it to the appearance and the performance of their products. The theme behind the Nike Free series is that the best way to improve upon 30 million years of evolution is to set it free. Who can argue with that wisdom?

Swiping creative ideas from Mother Nature is nothing new. In their fun and creative book “Wake up Your Creative Genius,” Kurt Hanks and Jay Parry offer several every day tools and items

whose basic principles are drawn from nature's example. Here are a few innovations that you may not have known were inspired by nature:

- The ascent and descent of submarines was designed after the principle of a fish bladder, which inflates or deflates with gas to change depth.
- Hypodermic needles were designed based on the way venomous snakes deliver their poison through their fangs.
- Velcro was inspired when a Swiss engineer encountered the holding power of a clinging burdock burr.
- The auto focus and exposure elements of a camera are patterned after the functioning of the human eye.

Another moving example comes from the breakthrough book, "The Medici Effect" by Frans Johansson. In the late 1990s, architect Mick Pearce and engineer Over Arum accomplished a feat of the impossible with the help of nature. They designed the largest consumer retail and commercial retail complex in Zimbabwe with no air conditioning. They did this by copying the way that termites cool their mounds in the African desert. The result speaks for itself. They saved their client, Old Mutual Insurance, more than \$3.5 million, and today, the Eastgate office complex maintains a constant temperature of 73-77 degrees. That's pretty cool, literally and figuratively.

If you want to mainline your eco-inspiration, check out the work of Dr. David Suzuki, Canada's most prominent and popular spokesperson for science and the environment. He is the host and the inspiration behind a CBC (Canadian Broadcast Corporation) series called "The Nature of Things." In this series, and in his dozens of thorough and profound essays, Dr. Suzuki presents some truly amazing links between the natural world and modern innovations.

GRAND BRANDING

Nature can also play an enormous role in effective branding and corporate image work. It has helped to sell everything from chocolate, to cars, to computers.

Some of the most widely recognized logos in the world have been inspired by nature, from the NBC peacock, to the MSN butterfly to the sunburst "o" of Dole Fruits. Look at some of today's corporate logos and you will see many familiar images rooted in the natural world. A great deal of thought went into many of these symbols. Consider the logo of Apple Computers. To the uninitiated, this corporate icon is simply an apple with a bite missing. To Steve Jobs, it represents the apple from the Tree of Knowledge, the one bitten by Eve in the Garden of Eden. They have taken one of the simplest and most recognized symbols of nature and made it a symbol of accessible, universal wisdom.

Beyond the graphic images, nature-based ideas are ingrained in the nomenclature of modern commerce. Amazon.com was named after the most voluminous

river in the world because founder Jeff Bezos thought it represented the potential volume of products he could sell using Internet technology and marketing savvy. Here are a few others you may recognize:

- Fuji Film is named for the highest mountain in Japan.
- Reebok is a variation on the name of an African antelope (rhebok).
- The literal translation of Daewoo is "great universe."
- Lycos, a major search engine and content provider on the Web was named for a family of wolf spiders (Lycosidae).
- Quark, the popular design software, is named after subatomic particles that are believed to be the fundamental constituents of all matter.

These are all brands with demonstrated staying power and there are hundreds more. They stand as a testament to the universal appeal and the lasting impact that nature can bring to a corporate image.

"nature can also play an enormous role in effective b®anding™"

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

The opportunities for nature as creative muse are far too numerous to outline them all in the space of this column. But it's clear that no other source of inspiration offers such diversity or such universal appeal. I hope I've given you enough to motivate you to seek your next burst of creative inspiration right from the source.

Until next time, listen to Mother
...and stay inspired.

BK ■

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