## Savanna Preference

A tendency to prefer savanna-like environments to other types of environments.1

People tend to prefer savanna-like environments—open areas, scattered trees, water, and uniform grassiness—to other natural environments that are simple, such as desert; dense, such as jungle; or complex, such as mountains. The preference is based on the belief that early humans who lived on savannas enjoyed a survival advantage over humans who lived in other environments. This advantage ultimately resulted in the development of a genetic disposition favoring savanna environments that manifests itself today. It may be no coincidence that the parks, resorts, and golf courses of the world all resemble savannas—they may reflect an unconscious preference for the look and feel of our ancestral, east-African home.2

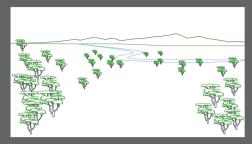
The characteristics of savannas that people prefer include depth, openness, uniform grassy coverings, and scattered trees, as opposed to obstructed views, disordered high complexity, and rough textures. The preference is found across all age ranges and cultures, though it is strongest in children and grows weaker with age. This finding is thought to corroborate the evolutionary origin of the preference; i.e., humans are increasingly influenced by knowledge, culture, and other environments as they grow older, interfering with innate preferences.

This causal explanation has been criticized as recent evidence suggests that early humans lived in a variety of environments (e.g. closed-canopy woodlands), but evidence for the existence of the preference is strong. For example, in an experiment where people were presented with images of savannas, deciduous forests, coniferous forests, rain forests, and desert environments, lush savannas were consistently preferred over other choices as a place to live or visit. The theory that the preference is related to the savanna's perceived resource richness is supported by the finding that the least preferred environment is the arid desert landscape.3

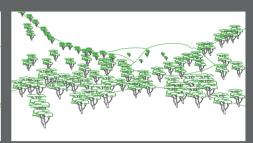
People have a general landscape preference for savanna-like or parklike environments that is independent of culture. Consider the savanna preference in the design of landscapes, advertising, and any other design that involves the creation or depiction of natural environments. The preference is strongest in young children. Therefore, consider savanna-like environments in the design of settings for children's stories and play environments.

See also Archetypes, Biophilia Effect, Cathedral Effect, Hunter-Nurturer Fixations, and Prospect-Refuge.

- <sup>1</sup> Also known as savanna hypothesis.
- <sup>2</sup> The seminal article on the savanna preference is "Development of Visual Preference for Natural Environments" by John D. Balling and John H. Falkin, Environment and Behavior, 1982, vol. 14, p. 5-28.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, "The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature" by Stephen R. Kellert, in The Biophilia Hypothesis by Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson (editors). Island Press, 1993.







When presented with images of environments such as these, people across cultures generally prefer the environments with unobstructed views, uniform grassy coverings, and scattered trees (left), as opposed to obstructed views, high complexity, and rough textures (right). This preference is stronger in children than in adults.



Though adults generally do not share the fascination, the Teletubbies (a children's television series) mesmerize children in more than 60 countries and 35 languages. Simple stories played out by four babyfaced creatures on a lush savanna landscape equal excellent design for young children.