

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that researchers are starting to give joy it's due. And studying joy is still in its early days. But scientists are figuring out that it has a role in our health. And they're figuring out that there's a connection between gratitude and spirituality and joy. And in order to do this, they develop measures of joy as a temporary state, which is called, feeling joyful in the moment, or something that's a personality trait that endures. Which is the tendency to experience joy more often or maybe less often than other people. And those are moderate to strong predictors of two different kinds of well-being. One called Hedonic and one called Eudaimonic well-being. I gave a talk about those at the Bulletproof conference three or four years ago. And it turns out though, other studies have found that joy is caused by a distinct pattern of thinking. Keep in mind, you can control your thoughts, you can't really control your emotions very well, but you can think a certain way.

People experience joy when they feel connected or reconnected to someone or something important. Joy predicts increased happiness over time. So you get a little bit more joy, you get more happy over time. And it seems like if you're not experiencing joy, or you don't even know if you're experiencing joy, there's probably a way to hack that. And this summary comes from Phil Watkins, is a professor of psychology at Eastern Washington University. He's one of the preeminent researchers on gratitude and joy and senior editor at the Journal of positive psychology. So if you're thinking about [biohacking 00:01:58] is this thing about sub cellular this, well it is, it's about changing the environment around you and inside of you so that you have control of your own biology.

If you want to be happy, remember, happy people generally perform better at almost everything because they're not miserable. Well, then maybe you should figure out how to hack joy, because it appears to be doable and relatively easy, at least the parts of joy that are based on a thought process, versus changing the way your physical system responds to the environment around you.

You may have predicted that we are going to be talking about joy today. And that's because today's guest is a designer and author whose groundbreaking work reveals how your surroundings influence your emotions, your well-being and yes, even your joy. The book is called, Joyful: The surprising power of ordinary things to create extraordinary happiness. And its author, Ingrid Fetell Lee, is on the show today and has created a website called, The Aesthetics Of Joy. But how to change the environment around you, so that you experience more joy and things. Welcome to the show, Ingrid.

Ingrid: Thank you so much for having me.

Dave: I'm going to confess something. I've heard of this company called IDEO, I-D-E-O, and I've read about it in Wired. And I know it's like the coolest designing and branding company out there. But after 20 years of my career, I still don't exactly know what IDEO does, but I do know you were there for 12 years. So tell me about this magic unicorn factory that everyone writes about, but no one knows what they do.

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Ingrid: Yes, actually, I was there six years, IDEO is a really incredible place. It started as a company that solved really difficult design and engineering problems. So designing things like the first Apple mouse, the first laptop computer, really complicated design problems and then as the company grew, and as design evolved, IDEO started to apply their methods. The methods really relate to a couple things, one human centered design. So putting people at the center of the process of design, it sounds obvious now. But when IDEO first started taking this approach, it was pretty radical, designers often just created things that popped into their minds. And they really weren't that focused on the people using those things.

IDEO really took this approach of going out, not just saying what do people want, but actually going out and observing people in their natural environment, to understand, what is it that people need? What are the things that people might need that they're not even expressing, or they're not even capable of expressing, because they're just making do with what they happen to have. And then the second piece of it is called, rapid prototyping, which basically says let's make something, we can't make the exact thing. Let's make something that is similar, let's hack together something that can give us an idea of whether this is the right or wrong solution.

So you make crude and early prototypes, you get feedback on them, you watch people try to use them, and then you refine them and refine them until you have a really novel innovative solution. And so now IDEO takes that approach and applies it to things like, designing an entire emergency room system, to make it more efficient and reduce medical errors. Or even designing things as large as an entire school system. Improve for example, so the method of, watching people and then making things and iterating on them. That approach is one that, it no longer has to be about tangible physical things, but can be about services and systems and all kinds of bigger problems in the world.

Dave: There is something that creates joy in me when I interact with any system that didn't waste one second of time or effort. And in fact, a lot of the... There's a Japanese concept around that, where there's a certain kind of beauty in that, where it's not just rigidly efficient, like a robot, but where it's elegant because it wasn't wasteful. Yet it worked as well as it could have. And I've never found exactly the right word for that. Is there a word for that?

Ingrid: I don't know if there's an exact word for that kind of joy. I think I would probably think about that in the category of Harmony, which is one of the 10 aesthetics of joy that I talked about in my work. Harmony is really about the joy we find in order and flow and balance and things working just right. When you see things perfectly organized, that also gives you that feeling of harmony, because it almost feels, magical that something could work so perfectly so seamlessly.

I think sometimes when we watch Rube Goldberg devices, and you see all those little parts magically working together in such an unlikely way, you get that that feeling of harmony as well.

Dave: Okay, so maybe harmony is part of it, but you can have harmonious things that aren't also functional. I think it's an engineering mindset, but I don't know that normal brains

do that. I'm a systems thinker, and you probably are too, although you probably are more artsy than I am. Does that feeling of you hopping in a car and everything is right where it should be? The controls are intuitive, you didn't have to think you just got in. You didn't have to figure out the windshield wipers because, somehow someone just thought ahead and put everything in the most useful place. Is that something you think most people experience joy from? Or is that just snubs?

Ingrid: That's a good question. I don't know if it's snubs, so much as I think we probably all appreciate that. But it becomes easy to take it for granted.

Dave: Okay. And if you have an expectation of that, and then you don't get it, then it creates unhappiness.

Ingrid: Absolutely. No question.

Dave: So, we shouldn't expect good design, but when we have it we should feel joyful.

Ingrid: Ideally. I mean, if we can recognize, I think maybe designers... it's funny, maybe designers have both more joy and more anxiety in the world around us because, when we see something so elegant, the way that you describe it, we feel an intense sense of joy because we know how much work went into that. When we see something that is lazy or just doesn't work properly, we feel a great sense of frustration because we know how easily it could have been done differently.

So, I think sometimes, people who really study and pay attention to these things have maybe more attention to that side of things, the functional side of things, than just when you're using something and you just expect it to do what it's supposed to do.

Dave: What's the longest argument you've ever had over a font?

Ingrid: That's a good question. I don't know. I mean, I'm not a graphic designer. So I don't spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about typefaces, but, probably a few weeks.

Dave: Well, the reason I was asking that is that, for people who are not designers, I'm not a professional designer, but I probably pay more attention to it just as an engineer than than average. Yeah, there's some people that they just have no idea you look at that sign, in fact, I walked through a mall with my kids and says, because I want you to look at the fonts and every sign on every logo. Someone spent weeks thinking about it on that font. And that one that's a mom and pop store. That's a font that came off of your Mac, and you see the difference. And it's, yeah, we do see the difference, but it's invisible. Unless you're in that industry, you just wouldn't know because it's just part of the fabric of the reality around you. But it was a consciously created one. And I think that's fascinating.

And to me, I actually do get some joy from just noticing stuff like that. But I want to dig in with you on your book, where you talk about joy versus happiness. Can you walk me and listeners through that nuance?

Ingrid: Sure. I think we often confuse these ideas in our culture and the words are often used interchangeably. Sometimes scientists even use the words interchangeably. So it can be very confusing to try to pull these two things apart. It was one of the most challenging things when I first started studying joy, was trying to understand exactly what is joy? And how is it different from positivity, happiness, and all these other words. But I think, broadly speaking, the easiest way to understand it is that happiness is a broad evaluation of how we feel about our lives over time. Scientists often use the word, subjective well-being, that's the sort of scientific jargon term that they use, to equate to happiness.

That really has to do with a big range of factors, how we feel about our work, how we feel about our relationships, how connected we feel to others, whether we feel like we have a sense of meaning and purpose in life, how we feel about our health, all of those things go into this complex equation of how happy we are. So any given moment, if you were to try to think, how happy am I, on a scale of one to ten, you don't usually just put your finger in there and go, I'm a seven today. You kind of have to think about all those different things and figure out where you are. It's a more reflective exercise.

Whereas joy is much simpler and more immediate. So the way that psychologists define joy, broadly speaking, is as an intense momentary experience of positive emotion. And that's something we can measure through actual physical expression. Smiling, laughter, those are two ways that we can understand whether someone around us is feeling joy and we can monitor our own reactions for those feelings. For those expressions to know when we're experiencing a moment of joy.

Dave: Is there a quantified brain state for joy? Can I hook e.g.s up to my head and figure out the joy alpha brainwave and the left frontal cortex? Have you come across anything like that when you were doing your research for joyful?

Ingrid: I haven't. I have found that generally the measures are more direct, they're more... generally when scientists are measuring this particular emotion, they're looking at facial expressions. And generally there are two muscles that they look at in the face. They look at the zygomatic major and the orbicularis oculi and the Zuka [Matic 00:13:10] this major is the one around that contracts the corners of your mouth, to lift your the corners of your mouth up into a smile. That's actually under our conscious control. That's why we can fake a smile, whereas the orbicularis oculi is not under our conscious control. So that's the one that, when we're looking for genuine joy, that's the one that we can look for. And know that, that person has to be feeling joy on some level because you can't fake that expression.

Dave: Right? You just gave all the spy agencies out there a really good idea, because you probably could learn to put that muscle under conscious control. With biofeedback, I'm intrigued.

Ingrid: I think the way that you would... if you wanted to elicit that expression you would have to, and this is the way actors do it, I'm assuming is, you would have to bring your mindset to something joyful, that would then elicit that state.

Dave: Interesting. That's so fascinating. So perhaps down the road, 10 years from now, whatever cameras are in your environment will be watching those muscles using algorithmic things, and they'll be doing a little happiness count. And if you don't get enough happiness, sorry, not happiness, joyful count, if you don't get enough joyful moments per day, they can give you an electric shock to make sure you stay joyful. This can be a great world.

Ingrid: Maybe, or I think the other thing about it is, there's research in that, the facial feedback hypothesis is a really interesting field of research, which basically says that our facial expressions do influence our emotions. And so when we make a joyful expression, when we smile, even though we fake a smile, that that can actually send signals to the brain that tell us that we are feeling joy and can actually make us feel more joy. That research is... the original research didn't replicate, but now there's certain researchers who believe that it is still valid and that there are reasons why the original studies on that didn't replicate.

But, but it's an ongoing field of study around this idea of facial feedback. But that is one way that we can actually start to elicit feelings of joy from the outside in.

Dave: Okay, so this is a joy hack, which is make yourself smile, even if you don't like it. And it's not going to harm you. And it will probably improve your ability to experience some joy or at least to experience less suffering, which is cool and cheap and easy. Let's dig in on the main reason that I wanted to share your work with the audience, is that you've identified these 10 areas that affect our level of joy, a lot of them are in the environment around us. So the definition of Biohacking is changing that environment around you and inside of you. But causing a reflection inside of you from the environment around you. Let's go through at least some of those 10 and talk about what happens in your experience of joy when this happens in the world around you.

Let's start with energy. How do you relate energy in the environment to joy in the mind or in the heart, or wherever joy lives?

Ingrid: So, maybe would help if I just take a quick step back and just talk a little bit about how our environment does relate to our emotions because I think for me, when I first came to this, it was a pretty strange idea. I had grown up with the belief that the stuff around me really didn't matter. It wasn't very important to my emotions or well-being and that really, Joy is supposed to come from within. And it wasn't until I was in design school. And it was at the end of my first year of design school, I had a review, I had laid out everything I had made over the course of the semester, and a professor said that he looked at everything. It was a panel of professors critiquing my work. And one of the professors said, your work gives me a feeling of joy. And all of the professor's nodded. And I thought, well, that's really weird, because I've been told that things can be... I can create, as a designer, things that are beautiful, I can create things that are nice to have. But they're not going to affect us on a deep level.

Because, that's supposed to happen from within. And so when he said that, I asked the professors, well, then how does that work? What's the brain science behind how that works? If I created something that's joyful, how did I do it? And then how do I do it

again? And they couldn't answer those questions. And so that's really what got me curious about how the environment influences our emotions. And what I found is that, as you said, they're 10 different ways, almost like triggers or levers that we can build into our environment in an intentional way to influence our emotions from the outside in. And that there's actually a pretty robust base of research. It's just happening in different labs all over the world.

My work is really about pulling that together so we can understand that our emotions really aren't just about, mindfulness and meditation, and those are great practices, therapy, all of those are great practices, gratitude, all of those are really important. But that actually, there's a whole field that has really been overlooked by mainstream psychology and by the sort of self-help industry that can help us use our environments to get more out of ourselves from an emotional perspective.

Dave: Okay, I completely support all of that perspective, including that sense of wonder from Professor saying, we don't really know why we felt that way. But does it translate? I mean, I can hear a certain song that has multiple levels of complexity, I'm like, this is so amazing, I could listen to this forever. And my brain just likes it. And then you might listen to it and say that's not bluegrass or whatever. The sense of joy isn't there forth, how much of this is individual versus shared by large swaths of people?

Ingrid: This is so important. So of course, we all have certain things that are personal, they're based on our personalities. And of course, our different personality attributes that can influence how we perceive the world. And there are things that we find joy in based on our memories. So, an example I often give is, there's, a certain wallpaper pattern that was in my grandmother's kitchen and when I see that pattern or something that looks like that pattern, I'll feel this intense spike of joy. That you could be standing right next to me and look at it and be like it's wallpaper. It's nice, and not have that response. We all have those individual things that either bring us joy or don't.

But, when I started to ask this question of where joy comes from, I just started talking to people and I started asking people about the things and places that brought them joy. And I started to notice that there were certain patterns, that certain things come up again and again and again. And there are things like cherry blossoms and hot air balloons and bubbles and kites and confetti and rainbows. I mean, anywhere you go in the world, if there's a rainbow people stop, they'll turn their heads in the sky, they'll look at it. They'll tell other people, they'll point. And so there are certain things that seem to bring joy the world over. And that's really where my research comes in. Because I'm interested in those universal aspects. And if there are certain elements.

What I found as I started setting those, things that seemed to be universally joyful is that there are certain properties or certain attributes of those things that make them so joyful. And, of course, we all have our own individual responses that will interact with this. But broadly speaking around the world, these 10 aesthetics of joy, these 10 elements are likely to give joy to, if not everyone to broad groups of people.

Dave: Okay, that's interesting. So you did study commonalities there. But what is the single biggest or the most impactful and if you had to stack rank and order these in terms of importance?

Ingrid: Well, you talked about energy. And I always like to put that first, because if we think about Joy, joy is a high energy emotion, there's a certain level of arousal associated with it. And there are certain aesthetics that elicit that, and the key elements there are color, bright color, and light. Those are the two things that are associated with this kind of energizing feeling, this joyful energizing feeling we get.

Now, I should say it's really important because not everyone is going to find all 10 of these aesthetics equally joyful and they're not necessarily all going to want to go paint their houses, bright colors, some will. But that's why there are 10; some people will find a lot more joy, for example, in freedom. Which is about being out in open spaces, nature, having lots of spaciousness around you having wild textures around you. So it really depends on you and in your experience, which ones of these you'll find the most joyful.

Dave: Okay, so you've created a roadmap of saying, okay, here's the 10 quadrants or 10, areas of the roadmap of things that cause joy, and then it's up to each of us to figure out which of those 10 has the biggest impact on us.

Ingrid: Exactly. But I do think there are certain things that are, for example, energy, if we look at the effects of color and light, they tend to be pretty universal. So bright color, if you look at children's drawings, studies of children's drawing show that when they are drawing pictures of joyful experiences and scenes, they use lots of bright colors. When they draw pictures of sad or angry scenes, they use a lot of brown, black and like dark purple. So they use sort of dull, dark colors, to relate to these negative emotions.

And so we find, around the world, you can see it in festivals, that there was always bright color and festivals. So this is associated with joy wherever we go. And there's a physiological effect to this to when people look at bright saturated colors, their physiological arousal goes up. So we can see that there is a physical effect and an emotional one that correspond.

Dave: There's a definite reason that the dominant color for Bulletproof is orange, I like orange but I wanted it to have some energy in it and I've gotten a lot of compliments on that. So it seems like people like it. But it also it resonates with what I wanted it to. And there are lots of other brands who choose all sorts of colors across the color palette. Are you finding that those color things are relatively universal? If red means death in some cultures, but excitement and others and things like that. Is this a cultural thing? Or is this wired into our biology? Because it seems to matter, there's just so much variety around the world. And if you were to say, I want to design my airport this way, and people from all over the world are going to come through, how do you sort that out?

Ingrid: Right. So it's always both. There's always a cultural layer going on and an individual layer and this deeper universal layer, this evolved layer of how we respond to things. Now,

the reason why we have this response to bright color, at least, a possible reason because with evolutionary explanations we can never be sure. Is that, our color vision evolved in part to help our primate ancestors find ripe fruit and young leaves in the tree top canopies that were likely to be more nutritious, rich and sugars. And so on some level when we see bright color, the evolutionary argument goes, we're seeing a sign of nourishment. And even though there's no longer any nourishment, we're so predictive over the generations, the thousands and thousands of generations, that our ancestors were evolving in a natural environment, that association still stays on some level.

And so, that's why we would have this evolutionary response. Now, of course, there are cultural associations with colors, and you mentioned, a few of them. And so I think that's why for me, it's much more interesting to focus on the brightness and the saturation of a color, how light or dark it is, and how pure the pigment is in that color, than on the hue. Because, the associations with colors, the cultural associations are often with a particular hue. When we focus more on the brightness of the color, then it's less important to think about, we can choose colors that are appropriate for a particular culture and focus less on that and focus more on introducing a pop of vibrant color in whatever shade we love or our culture, says is, corresponds to the need. And we can get the joyfulness that way.

So it's not necessarily that red is more joyful than blue or yellow, more joyful than green. But that actually that as long as you have a color you love, choose a brighter version of it. For, an application like painting your front door, or putting a coffee mug on your desk in the morning so that when you drink your morning, Bulletproof coffee, you're drinking it and something that's bright and vibrant and if you hate yellow, don't make it yellow, make it a very bright blue. But make it something that will give you that that joyful burst.

Dave: There are some studies that show that coffee tastes 20% sweeter when you drink it out of a white porcelain. And that drives me nuts. Do you know why that is? Or why the color of your utensils would change the taste of your food?

Ingrid: Yeah, so this is a field of research called Cross Modal Research. And it's a really interesting field of research which talks about how our senses interrelate and how perceptions from one sense modality like sight might influence a modality like taste. I think that again, there are cultural reasons that cross modal researchers have found and also possibly universal ones that have to do with expectations. So for example, there are studies that show that when we make a liquid red, we're more likely to taste the same sugar solution as sweeter when it's red versus when it's green. And that might have to do with the fact that as things ripen, they often become more red. And that's not to say that some fruits aren't perfectly ripe when they're green. But as a general pattern, things move on toward the warmer end of the color spectrum as they ripen.

So it may be that there's an expectation there. But that's really speculation at this point, I think is interesting how they relate though.

Dave: I think we can just blame kale. Tastes so nasty, and it's green that we just associate those two and I'm just kidding. I'm anti kale. I've just decided to come out and tell the

world that. You know what I mean, in terms of the color palette, how many sweet green things are there? Not many.

Ingrid: Not many.

Dave: Yeah, just as I think about, that's the most bitter green thing I could think of off the top of my head. Okay, I buy that. So it's just a bias that's built in to our perception. So color matters, different people are going to like different colors, but paying attention to that in your environment works. Now, I'm going to put on my computer hacker hat here. My design ethos, especially when I was younger in college was probably more like cement rivets and exposed wiring. Because I thought it was cool, not necessarily something that brought joy. Although, seeing a really well put together industrial interior design kind of the things I actually need.

But I wouldn't have had the skills to go out and say, Hey, I'm going to build an environment to bring myself joy. How do you recommend people are listening to the show today who maybe aren't designers, other than, going to IKEA and picking up a blue or an orange pillow or something like, how do you actually put this into practice?

Ingrid: I think you're hitting on something so important, which is that a lot of us, most of us have been made to feel that the way that we're supposed to decorate our environments, is function of good taste. Some arbitrary standard of good taste that is often dictated by magazines and by blogs and by people who are not us. But to me, the most important feature of an environment is how it makes us feel. And so my hope is that by actually understanding that, you have within you a natural compass, that when you walk into a room and you say, ooh, that feels good. You are gathering information about the kinds of spaces that feel good to you. And by listening to that by tuning into the visceral feeling of an environment, as opposed to Oh, I think this looks good. It would look good on the cover of a magazine. By tuning into your own intuition around that, I think it's less about skill and it's more about feeling out, how places make you feel and starting to pay attention to that.

Now of course there are tools that we learn as designers that can help you. One of the things I often say about color is to look at pieces of art that you love. The artists David Hockney always used to whenever he has a color problem, he says... whenever he's not sure what colors to use, he looks at [Matisse 00:31:23] paintings, because Matisse is an amazing colorist, right? So if you find a piece of art that you love, you can feel good about the fact that the colors in that if you translate them to a space will probably go together there as well. So there are shortcuts there are ways that we can approach this, but I think the most important thing is to first tune into what feels good to you.

Dave: Okay, got it. I actually when I go into a space, I noticed something really cool. I'll take a picture of it. So I have sort of these spaces that I like, little set of photos. And it's just little elements, in part because, I have coffee shops, and I like to bring that into them. And people who've seen, like my Instagram of my offices just kind of mid-century modern with some weird stuff in it. But that came about as a result of just noticing, documenting and then incorporating, even though I am far from an expert in that kind

of stuff. But I also have the benefit of being able to hire people who are experts to take those ideas and help me tick off the rough edges and all.

But that's something I do and same thing. One of these days, I'll actually start some line of clothing, because I noticed weird little details and colors and materials and like no one does that. I want something that looks like that. So someday that'll happen. But I think it's that same thing, just noticing what's really stands out and kind of keeping a file on that. At least that's my practice for that. Is that a good practice? Is that what real designers do?

Ingrid: That's a great practice, it's definitely what real designers... I mean, I think on some level, we're all real designers. But, yes, that's certainly I think a great approach, is to use your senses as the guide. And when you find things you love, capture them and then start to notice patterns. What is it about... if you've taken five pictures this week of environments, what is the same about them? Is it that they all have, this bright shaft of natural light coming through? Is it that they all have plants? There are certain things that you'll start to notice and be able to bring that into your home or your work environment.

Dave: Do you ever see a future where you'd be able to walk into an environment, note the cool stuff, press a button on your phone or your augmented reality glasses someone says, put this in my cool file. Run all of your cool files through machine learning and artificial intelligence stuff, and have it kick out a design for what your living room should look like. And are we going to automate the design process where we can just tease out all the elements? Because you're saying pay attention, note the commonalities. It seems like we already have systems today that note commonalities that humans don't note very well. I mean, are we five years out from that 10 years from that, or is that never going to happen?

Ingrid: I'm not sure about the technology there. I think for me, it's actually the noticing that's really important.

Dave: Yeah, that's the hard part too.

Ingrid: It is and I think, because my feeling is that we have really become disconnected from our senses in a lot of ways. And part of that is the way that design has evolved to be very focused on this, perpetuating a certain aesthetic. And modernism is really I think a lot to blame this idea that everything should be spare and concrete and not have plants and very harsh environments. And it's the kind of environment we find when we go through an airport or when we go to a government building or many offices feel like this. Where there's just nothing natural there no curves. And to me that I think has really disconnected us from our senses. Because to thrive, in an environment like that, to focus and to function, we have to kind of turn off our senses. We have to know how ugly it is, and not just ugly, how jarring that is to our sensory perceptive capabilities.

So, I think for me, the most important thing is actually just turning that that loop back on, that feedback loop back on and starting to notice, because the noticing is what will

hone that intuition. And maybe there'll be a time when we can have machines do that for us, but to me, the most important thing is to reconnect the sensory and the emotional systems. Those things are already connected. We're just not consciously aware of it. So we have to start paying attention to the environments that make us feel good. So we can start bringing those things back in.

And my work is really about giving us a head start on that, to say, here's some things that universally seem to have evolved to make us thrive. Let's start with those things. But there is an individual peace to it as well.

Dave: I absolutely love that. It's the same thing really, that I started doing with food. It's like what is going to give me food high versus just taste good versus just be cheap. And so you can do the same thing with everything in your environment. All right, that really resonates with me. Okay, let's talk about abundance. Because it seems like that's the opposite of this in your book, *Joyful*, you talk about how Oh, well not having stuff around you [inaudible 00:36:48], the sense of that, because if it's... I'm getting this backwards. Sorry, that's freedom. That's open space and then you have abundance which is too much sparseness.

So you're saying, okay, we're going to feel joy if you don't have too much empty space and you don't have too much stuff. It seems like a very narrow line to dance between abundance and freedom in creating the environment you live in. How do you get that right?

Ingrid: Okay, yeah, let's talk about this. So I think it's interesting because some of these aesthetics do seem like their intention, but actually, I think they're more... it's a little bit more fluid than it sounds. So freedom is very much drawn from the experience of being in nature and nature can be an extremely abundant experience. Even when you're out in an open space, like a meadow, for example, there's an intense and surreal abundance because I don't know if you've noticed this, but, I often find that nature is noisier than actually being in a quiet room. You have all the noises, the birds, the insects, there's the peepers, the frogs at night. There's a lot of noise, but it's an ordered kind of sound. That is really pleasing to us. And it's soothing to us on a visceral level.

There's movement, there's constant movement in nature. So there's often an abundance of sensation. I think that, when we talk about open space, it's not necessarily a big white box that's empty. It's more about, making sure that there's freedom to move, and that you feel, we haven't crammed every inch of our lives with stuff. Now when we think about abundance, it's less about material abundance, having lots of stuff and more about this idea of sensorial abundance.

I think the moment I had this realization was when I went to visit an apartment designed by an artist and a poet couple, so neither of them were architects, but they believed that the kinds of ordinary environments that we move through our offices and our cities and whatnot, are killing us. That they actually hasten our aging, because they don't have enough sensations in them. And so what they built where these environments, they have sloping floors, they call this apartment building the reversible destiny lofts. And the idea is that this apartment building could reverse aging. And so the floor slope, they

have these little bumps on them, they have... to get around the apartment, you have to kind of hold on to poles that are inset into the floor and handles around the apartment. They're bright colors everywhere. And the bathroom is actually shaped like a cylinder on its side, so the floor curves, instead of being flat. And there's a room that's just a sphere that you can sit in, or climate or do whatever you want.

But the whole idea was that, if we don't use our senses, then our minds start to atrophy. And I think there's now an emerging body of research that says that this might be true. That research in animals is starting to suggest that when animals are in sensory deprived environments, minimalist environments as opposed to sincerely enriched environments that their slide into dementia is faster. That cognitive decline is faster in a sensory deprived environment. And there's research in people where they've done tests have enriched work environments versus minimalist work environments or lean work environments. And what they find is that, those environments that have art and plants and more sensory stimuli, people are 15% more productive in those enriched environment.

I think there are good reasons to think that by stimulating our senses, maybe not by living in something as wild as the reversible destiny apartments, we can actually keep our minds younger and more facile and that it's more about... it's less about lots of stuff and more about just stimulating our senses on a regular basis.

Dave: The flip side of that reversible destiny apartment, which I've seen a few science fiction books that took advantage of that idea, you have environments that constantly change around you to keep you young. In Guantanamo, they have environments where the wall is white, the everything is white, the lighting is light. So there's just no visual contrast anywhere. And it's a form of torture and breaking people down. So that's an extreme example on the other end of it [inaudible 00:41:30].

Ingrid: It absolutely is, I mean, if you think about the environment, we evolved in, it had... it was this natural environment where we had all these sensory stimuli and when we move into a man-made environment, we've taken a lot of those sensations out. And so if you... probably the most robust area of research around the connection between our emotions and mental functioning, and the environment is on nature. When we look at this body of research that has been growing, it shows that our minds function optimally when we're in nature. And when we're exposed to nature. Being out in nature quiets the part of the brain that worries and brews over problems, our sense of time expands, we actually think that a walk takes longer. The same length of walk takes longer when it's in nature versus when it's in an urban environment. Nature restores our cognitive capacity, it makes us more generous.

There's so many attributes that are heightened or the ways that we want to be in the world are heightened when we're out in nature. And to me, that's not necessarily saying that we have to go back to nature, but we have to look at the difference between a natural environment. Sensorily, during a natural environment and what we have built as humans, these concrete spaces that are really often quite joyless and we have to think about putting some of that back in.

Dave: Okay, we would kind of go through the first half of your list, which are things that you might expect, okay, you don't want too much junk around. You don't want empty environment. You want the right colors and things like that. But the second half of your list, it sounds like it's pretty much burning that. You've got surprise, transcendence, magic celebration and renewal. Did you consciously design its so the first half is like, Okay, this is what you would decide to do, but you're not a lot of people put, at least I wouldn't imagine a lot of people put surprise or transcendence as a things that they're looking for in their living room?

Ingrid: Right. That's true.

Dave: Walk us through a surprise, what do you say about surprise?

Ingrid: Yeah. So I do think about these as the first five, energy, abundance, freedom, harmony and play, are things that are very easy to access and understand and easy to build into any kind of space. And then the second half is really, these things are a little bit more specific they have to do with the relationship between joy and other emotional states. So surprise is its own emotion. It's one of the six primary emotions like joy that is universally experienced. And what I have noticed is that joy and surprise often go together not always. But there are ways in which the experience of surprise, because surprise can be either positive or negative. But positive surprises can heighten the feeling of joy. And when we think about surprise in a space, it's really about that experience of contrast.

So, when you come around a corner and you see a really amazing piece of street art, or you see a little flower growing up through the sidewalk where it doesn't belong. Those experiences can give us this little joyful burst because we're not expecting it. And that difference of expectations is what can really heightened our joy. So using that principle of contrast, we can bring that into our space in ways that add a little bit more delight to everyday life.

Dave: Okay, I got that. So those strange little design elements, although, I suppose if you're going into a restaurant or something, but if it's your own house, nothing's going to be surprising. Because you put it there. And it was there yesterday. How do we bring a surprise into our houses?

Ingrid: I think, it's a great question. I think what's really interesting to me is to stop thinking about a space as a fixed space and think about it more as in terms of time. The way that you move through a space and the pace at which you move through a space. So, for example, one of the things that I did in my house was paint, bright yellow cabana stripes on the inside of the hall closet. Now, that's not something I'm going into every minute, but it's something that pretty much once a day or once every couple of days, I have to go in there. And it's not that I necessarily forget that I did that, but I, I'm not thinking about it. Because my attention is somewhere else. So if you think about the flow of attention, and where your attention is in a space, when you close things off, if you have a brightly colored drawer liners is another way to do this. A hall bathroom that you don't use all the time, but it's just like a little... you put a really bright colored wallpaper in there.

So there are things you can do, even in your desk drawers is a fun place to do it hide something that you can then rediscover later.

Dave: You talked about in your book, you say the God of good taste demands sacrifices, and it's always the weird, quirky, awkward parts of ourselves that are first to be thrown on the pyre. Yet that's where the surprises lie. Tell me more about, weird, quirky, awkward parts of ourselves and how that translates into stripes in your closet?

Ingrid: Sure. Surprise, I talked about the principle of contrast, I think the other piece of surprise has to do with the offbeat, the disruption, the quirky the disruption of expectations. So there are all kinds of expectations that we have in life. Some of our expectations are set by the laws of physics and the way things are supposed to behave. Some of them are set by, cultural factors. Some are set by the seasons and the way the sun rises and sets. But some of the expectations that we have are set by norms, cultural norms and ways that we believe people should behave.

And so, to me, there's often a joy in those quirky things, I mean, I think that's a lot of the joy of things you find on Etsy, for example. There's the quirky handmade things that are a little bit different or offbeat. I often talk about, the Flamingo is an example of a bird that really doesn't conform to our expectations of what a bird should look like. So it's just a weird bird. And that is a very joyful animal you often see it on, people use it as brand icons, and they place it on things because it's so quirky and, and joyful.

So there can be a joy that we find in these quirky things that don't conform to norms. And that's another form of surprise. It's another form of disrupting expectations. And I think that's often the thing that is... I talked before about design and what we put in our spaces is often dictated by, someone else's good taste. Someone else's idea of good taste. I think as we start to tune back into ourselves, we start to find, we start to uncover more of those quirky things, quirky collections that we might have that, we would be tempted to just put in a drawer, but would actually bring a lot of joy if we put them on display.

So bringing those things out into the open, not only does it personalize the space, but it is a way of creating that element of surprise, that disruption of expectations.

Dave: Okay, what about transcendence? You talked about how having stuff float, is really important. That surprised me in Joyful, in your book. How do we bring that into our lives in order to experience more joy? I mean, do you have the magnetic floaty pin on your desk? I couldn't find other ways to bring that in.

Ingrid: Right. So, if you look, this is another one of the things we see around the world where joy is often described as light or being light hearted, and sadness is heavy. So there seems to be a vertical spectrum of emotions. And there are different reasons that, that might be the case but a lot of it has to do with I think with gravity. Gravity pulls us down, it makes things heavy and weighty. And, when we are able to escape gravity through a hot air balloon or a plane or a kite, then we feel this sense of lightness and elevation. This feeling of transcendence that we get, I think that there are a number of things that

can happen. One is that can give us a sense of perspective. So research has shown when we move upward in space, even just going up the height of a staircase, it actually helps us zoom out. We focus more on the broader conceptual problem and we get less bogged down in the details. So, that's one of the things that can happen. It can sort of help us zoom out.

It can also create feelings of awe which is again, not the same as joy but it's an emotion that often overlaps with joy. And that feeling of, aah can help create a normal sort of spiritual feeling. I think this is why we often find cathedrals are very tall in proportion because they draw the eye upward and they have stained glass and fine buttresses that sort of pull the eye polite in a pie, that sort of draws the eye up in space and really emphasizes that vertical dimension.

This is not something... if you live in a normal height, if you've normal high ceilings, transcendence might not be something that you are going to cultivate in your own apartment or in your house. Although you can certainly do things to draw the eye upward by hanging decorations, mobiles. Things that... light decorations, the pendant lights, things like that, that draw the eye upward. So there are ways to bring in a taste of this, but I think is also something to, for example, in offices, when you have an office that has a double height. Being mindful of how you use the difference in height to, draw people upward when they're focusing on, bigger picture things. Using that space for a brainstorm room, for example, or a conference room as opposed to, just putting desks in it.

So just thinking about how you use different spaces to elicit the right mode of activity or behavior.

Dave: Okay, that makes so much sense. Talk about magic, okay, now we're getting really out there. And I mean, this really is straight up from like, the list of Burning Man values, I think. It was saying magic plays a pivotal role in fueling innovation in progress. What is magic?

Ingrid: Okay, so this was my question I was thinking about, how joy in childhood is so intertwined with magic. We are free to believe in anything we want to believe and, the adults around us conspired to help us believe that. And if you've ever seen, Elf on a Shelf, people moving the elf around in their house. And the wonder that kids feel, the wonder that they feel when they watch superhero movies, and all of that still feels possible. There's a state of being, when the possibilities in our world feel expanded. As we get older, the possibilities start to become more constrained, we learn more about the world, it feels more fixed, we have less of that experience of wonder.

And I think that can sometimes make it hard to have big creative leaps, or big scientific leaps. And, what's really interesting to me, when I was doing this research is that often, it is magical beliefs that were the precursors to big scientific discoveries. So astrology, was really the forerunner for astronomy. And it makes so much sense, the reason that humans started to develop instruments that were capable of tracking the positions of the stars and the planets, and looking at them was because they believed that those

planets had an influence on them, and they wanted to know what they were doing. So, that's what got them curious about it.

Or the alchemy, the father of chemistry was an alchemist, he was trying to turn lead into gold. And it was his experiments in trying to do that, that convinced him that there were actually atoms that were, unchangeable at a basic level. That, alchemy was actually impossible. So we ended up disproving the thing that drew him to it. And so often this ability to believe that the possibilities of our world are bigger than what we see, than what we can immediately detect, that pulls us forward that ignites our curiosity and pulls us forward to discovery.

Dave: I love it that you brought up alchemy there. That's the first chapter in my new book, a superhuman is about alchemy and how it's tied even with the field of anti-aging now. So I dug really deep on, that pretty much all of modern chemistry and engineering came about from alchemists, which a lot of people don't know. So that's kind of cool.

Ingrid: Totally. And so I think we live in this world where we believe that there's science, and then there's, everything else. And I think it's important to understand the difference between, proven fact, and the things that we believe in. But I think that there's a space for, when we witness something that is so unbelievable. For me, this was the Northern Lights, when I went to Iceland, and I saw the Northern Lights, it's so unbelievable. And even though you know that it's magnetism and that their forces that are causing, it feels magical. And that makes you want to learn more about it. And I think cultivating those moments starting to notice, when you see fireflies, or for me right now I'm actually looking at my garden, and there's a hummingbird who comes by. And it's just amazing to watch this creature hovering in midair, you feel, there are things in our environment. Especially when they're calling attention to the invisible, to the things that are around us that we don't pay attention to, because wind, magnetism, these invisible forces in our lives. That's where the magic lies.

Dave: Tell me about Joyspotting, what's that?

Ingrid: Joyspotting is something that really started by accident for me was, I was going around as I developed this set of 10 aesthetics and was walking around, I would notice something joyful. And I would take note of it, I often share it on my blog. My blog is now 10 years old. And, in the beginning that's really what most of what my blog was. It was just, I saw something joyful. And then I wanted to understand it, I wanted to share it. And as I started to do it, I noticed that it became like a kind of mindfulness practice that made me feel better. That instead of turning inward, and necessarily watching my own mental and emotional state, I was turning to my environment, and noticing the things in my environment that could lift my spirits.

And as I started to share this practice, I found that there are lots of others who do it as well, their families to do it on the way to school. It's something very quick, you can do it, you don't have to dedicate time to it, because you can do it while you're commuting, you can do it anytime. And it really is just the act of tuning your senses, tuning your attention to something that is joyful in your surroundings, something that lifts you up. And to me, this practice is really powerful, because it helps you build the muscle for

understanding that your surroundings can be a kind of reservoir for positivity in your life. And yeah-

Dave: It's like a gratitude practice, but it's real time, and you're spotting things that bring you joy, or you're spotting other people experiencing joy.

Ingrid: Yes, you're noticing, it might be that you notice a couple of dogs playing with each other on the side of the street. It might be that you notice, you look around and you notice someone wearing a colored jacket that just lights you up. So, you're just tuning your attention to something that lifts your spirits in a moment.

Dave: Okay. It's a form of awareness training. Okay, I like that. That's actually really cool. It's not something that I've heard of before. I have one more question for you. That may seem a little dark after that talk of Joyspotting. But it's the question I've been asking all of the guests on the show, because they come from really different backgrounds. And I've been pretty public, most recently in Men's Health and Wired about this... I'm going to live to at least 180. And I want to get your take on that. As a designer, so I'm going to focus on joy, how long do you think you're going to live, given where we are with technology, given where the world's going?

Ingrid: It's funny because I don't ever think about this. I really don't, I think about... I don't know enough about the technology around aging to give an educated guess. I think-

Dave: You have to have an expectation though, everyone has an expectation.

Ingrid: I guess I have a hope that I could make it to my 90's, but I have no idea if that's... that's that would be my hope. If I get anything beyond that I'd be so happy and excited. To me, I'm just the kind of person who wakes up every day. And I am just so happy to be here on this planet. And so, I hope it keeps going as long as I can be healthy and able to enjoy it.

Dave: So you've got that joy and gratitude thing already going and you're good with it as long as it lasts. Right? I can understand that. It has been a great pleasure to have you on the show. It has brought me joy. And we got to experience at least nine of the 10 things that bring you joy from your book Joyful. And I wanted to say thank you for writing it and paying attention to something that is ephemeral and hard to design, Ingrid. It's been a great pleasure having you on the show.

Ingrid: Thank you so much.

Dave: Your website is Aesthetics Of Joy. Your book is called Joyful, it's easy to find wherever books get bought. So, I would just recommend if you liked today's episodes, you should go to the website. Practice Joyspotting. Think about reading the book. It'll make you pause and think about things in your environment that are changing your biology and your psychology and your emotions that you probably never noticed. Have a beautiful day.

