

A group of students are sitting and standing on a large green lawn. In the background, a large cathedral with multiple spires is visible under a clear sky. The scene is bright and sunny.

SPATIAL AND
INTERIOR DESIGN

SUMMER INSPIRATIONS

A short invitation for upcoming BA students

Start anywhere. Follow what catches your attention. This is not homework, and it is not a checklist. Choose a few starting points that genuinely interest you. Watch, visit, compare, draw, collect, make and reflect. Let the summer help you find what moves you.

How to use this pack

Do a little, but do it with attention. Stay with things that make you pause, laugh, think, feel unsure, or want to know more. Bring something with you in September: a sketch, a question, a comparison, a photograph, a material, a small model, a collage, or a memory.

LOOK CLOSELY

Design begins with attention. Before a project becomes a drawing, a model or an image, it begins with noticing: how people move, where they pause, what feels welcoming, what feels awkward, what is hidden in plain sight, and what a space seems to expect from the people who use it.

Observation is not passive. It is an active design tool. When you look carefully, you begin to collect evidence: light, sound, smell, material, furniture, signs, thresholds, routines, gestures, habits and atmospheres. These small details can tell you how a space works, who it includes, who it excludes, and what it wants to communicate.

This is not about finding a correct answer. It is about training curiosity. Follow what catches your attention, especially when you do not yet know why it matters.

Notice an everyday space

Choose a place you know well: your room, kitchen, hallway, bus stop, local shop, cafe, library, station, park bench or street corner. Spend 20-30 minutes there and look again.

What draws me in?

Where do people pause, wait, gather, hide or feel comfortable?

What role do light, sound, smell, furniture, material and temperature play?

Who seems welcome here, and who might feel excluded?

What stayed with me after I left?

Capture something: a photograph, quick sketch, material detail, short note, sound, memory, or a question you could not stop thinking about.



Richard Wentworth
Untitled, 2015

HOW OTHERS LOOK

The references below are useful because they show how artists, writers and designers look at the world around them. You do not need to finish all of them. Dip into one book, watch one episode, look at a few images, or follow one idea that changes how you notice things.

John Berger, Ways of Seeing: a classic reminder that looking is never neutral. Images carry assumptions about power, value, ownership, desire and everyday life.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/56465/ways-of-seeing-by-berger-john/9780141035796>

John Berger, Ways of Seeing TV series: short films that introduce the same ideas through spoken reflection, images and close looking.

<https://archive.org/details/BBCWaysOfSeeing>

Georges Perec, An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris: ordinary public life recorded patiently, almost like field notes from a city.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/313065/an-attempt-at-exhausting-a-place-in-paris-by-perec-georges/9780241475218>

Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows: a short poetic essay on shadow, light, material, patina and atmosphere. Useful for thinking about how spaces are felt, not only seen.

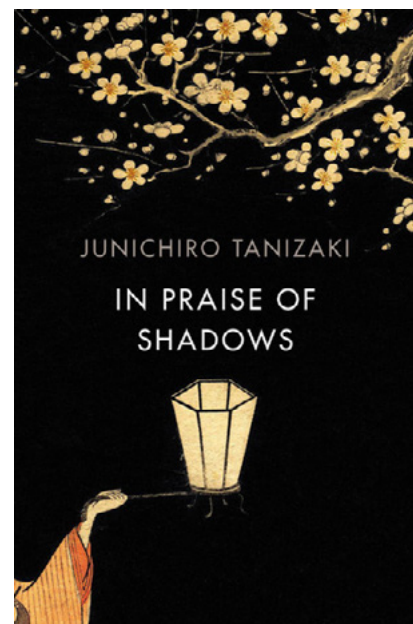
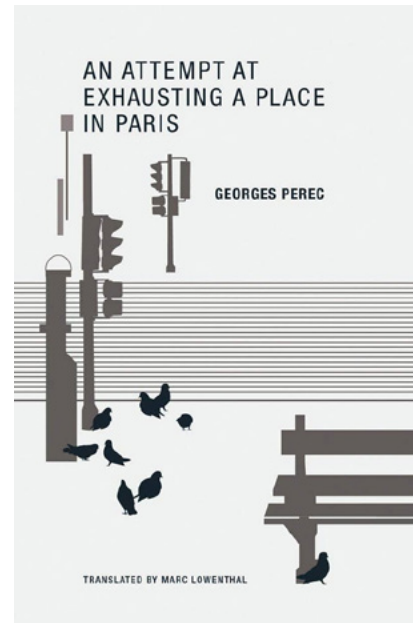
<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/355259/in-praise-of-shadows-by-junichiro-tanizaki/9781784875572>

Richard Wentworth, Making Do and Getting By: everyday improvisations, repairs and small acts of spatial intelligence

<https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/richard-wentworth>

Maira Kalman, My Favorite Things: an image-rich exploration of objects, collections, memory and personal meaning. Useful for seeing how ordinary things can carry stories and attachments.

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/publications/my-favorite-things/>



EXPAND YOUR REFERENCES

Designers are shaped by more than design examples. Film, art, technology, music, cities, books, objects, science, fashion, history and everyday life can all become part of your design imagination.

Watch: films, design and creative thinking

Films, documentaries and talks can help you notice how rooms, landscapes, objects, light, sound, costume and movement shape emotion, power and memory. Choose one or two, then pay attention to what stays with you.

Parasite, Bong Joon Ho: a house that behaves like a social diagram; stairs, windows, thresholds and hidden rooms turn class into space.

Dune: Part One and Part Two, Denis Villeneuve: world-building at an epic scale, where desert, sound, architecture, costume and ritual make power and belief feel physical.

The Grand Budapest Hotel, Wes Anderson: a jewel-box world of colour, symmetry and theatrical interiors, playful on the surface and melancholic underneath.

The Truman Show, Peter Weir: a perfect town that is also a stage set; useful for thinking about domestic comfort, surveillance, control and artificial normality.

Blade Runner 2049, Denis Villeneuve: a slow, atmospheric future of fog, glare, scale and loneliness, where interiors and cities feel like emotional weather.

Playtime, Jacques Tati: a comic maze of glass, reflections, offices and restaurants, showing how modern spaces choreograph people, sometimes beautifully and sometimes badly.

As you watch, notice what stays with you: a room, a corridor, a staircase, a landscape, a light condition, a sound, a joke, a feeling, or a question. These moments can become design references later.

Design, culture and creative thinking

Abstract: The Art of Design: especially Es Devlin, for stages, performance, light and immersive spatial experience; and Olafur Eliasson, for light installations, atmosphere and perception.

<https://www.netflix.com/title/80057883>

The Secret Genius of Modern Life: everyday objects, systems and technologies.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/search?q=The%20Secret%20Genius%20of%20Modern%20Life>

Around the World in 80 Treasures: objects, places, cultures, histories and how things carry meaning.

<https://www.justwatch.com/uk/tv-series/around-the-world-in-80-treasures>

Listen: conversations about design and everyday life

99% Invisible: hidden design in everyday life, from buildings and cities to objects and infrastructure.

<https://99percentinvisible.org/>

The DisOrdinary Architecture Project: podcasts and audio resources on disability, access, architecture and spatial justice. Useful for thinking beyond conventional ideas of accessibility, and for understanding how different bodies and lived experiences shape the way spaces are designed and used.

<https://disordinaryarchitecture.co.uk/start-learning>

Material Matters with Grant Gibson: materials, making, craft and design.

<https://www.materialmatters.design/podcast>

Homing In by The Modern House: home, memory, atmosphere and how people live with spaces.

<https://www.themodernhouse.com/podcast/>

The Second Studio: architecture, design, education, creative practice and studio culture.

<https://www.secondstudiopod.com/>

Look: creative practice & spatial imagination

Bruno Munari, Design as Art: play, usefulness, humour, experiment and visual intelligence.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/56455/design-as-art-by-munari-bruno/9780141035819>

Peter Zumthor, Atmospheres: how spaces feel through light, sound, material, temperature and memory.

<https://birkhauser.com/books/9783034607430>

Austin Kleon, Steal Like an Artist: a light, generous book about borrowing, remixing, collecting influences and turning what you love into something of your own.

<https://austinkleon.com/steal/>



Some references are watched or read; others are walked through.

Look/visit: experience real spaces

Design is not only something you see on a screen. You experience it with your body: through movement, sound, light, scale, texture, temperature, memory and atmosphere.

Visit places that interest you, local or new. Do not just look as a visitor. Look as someone trying to understand how space works.

London suggestions

Design Museum, Kensington: contemporary design, objects, fashion, graphics, architecture and design culture.

<https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions>

<https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/es-devlin-other-worlds>

Sir John Soane's Museum: interior atmosphere, collecting, light, spatial compression and domestic museum-making.

<https://www.soane.org/>

<https://www.soane.org/exhibitions/madelon-vriesendorp-mind-games>

V&A South Kensington: furniture, fashion, theatre and performance, and architecture-related collections.

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/south-kensington>

V&A East Museum / V&A East Storehouse: display, collection, storage, access, making and contemporary cultural infrastructure. Look at how objects are arranged, explained and made public.

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/east>

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/east/storehouse/visit>

Museum of the Home, Hoxton: domestic life, furniture, class, culture, family, identity and changing ideas of home.

<https://museumofthehome.org.uk/>

Serpentine Pavilion, Kensington Gardens: temporary architecture at full scale.

<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/serpentine-pavilion-2026-by-isabel-abascal-and-alessandro-arienzo-lanza-atelier/>

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: contemporary art, architecture, installation, display and visual culture.

<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/summer-exhibition-2026>

Look for: light,
material, sound,
movement,
furniture,
atmosphere,
thresholds, display,
scale, and who uses
the space and how.

Look/visit: experience real spaces

Kent-based suggestions

Turner Contemporary, Margate: gallery space, light, views, exhibition-making and the relationship between art, architecture and place.

<https://turnercontemporary.org/whats-on/>

The Historic Dockyard Chatham: adaptive reuse, industrial heritage, large-scale interiors, material atmosphere and spatial storytelling.

<https://thedockyard.co.uk/>

The Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, Canterbury: a civic interior combining museum, gallery, library and public use.

<https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/our-museums/the-beaney/>

Canterbury Cathedral and Precincts: scale, procession, light, ritual, sound, material and thresholds between public, sacred and historic space.

<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/visit/>

Before travelling:
check current dates,
opening times, ticket
prices and booking
requirements.

Current and upcoming shows, events and online references

Degree-show season often happens in June and early July. If a physical show has closed, look for online showcases, student portfolios, Instagram posts or recorded tours.

RCA2026: School of Design EXPO: open 16-19 July. The earlier School of Architecture Show has finished, but online material may still be available.

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/rca2026-school-of-design-expo/>

London Design Festival: 12-20 September, a strong option close to the start of term.

<https://londondesignfestival.com/>

Open House Festival: 12-20 September. Bookings for ticketed activities open on 19 August.

<https://programme.openhouse.org.uk/>

Material Matters / Shoreditch Design Week: materials, making, craft and design culture.

<https://materialmatters.design/The-Fair>

<https://shoreditchdesignweek.com/>

Design Museum: Es Devlin, Other Worlds: opens later in the autumn. Particularly relevant for stage design, light, audience, performance and immersive spatial experience.

<https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/es-devlin-other-worlds>

MAKE TEST REFLECT

Design is also something you try. You can cut, layer, photograph, scan, draw, model, remix, write, record, fold, tape, collect, arrange and test. You can work by hand, on a phone, in Photoshop or Photopea, in Rhino, SketchUp or Blender, or through any combination of analogue and digital tools.

There is no right or wrong outcome here. The aim is to become playful, curious and experimental. Strange attempts, unfinished tests and accidental discoveries are often more useful than polished images that teach you nothing.

Possible creative tests

Make a collage of a place you know well: change its atmosphere by adding a different light, texture, colour, object, view, weather, person, smell, memory or sound. Work by hand, in Photoshop, Photopea or GIMP.

Create an impossible interior: combine fragments from different rooms, shops, streets, museums, films or memories to make a space that could not exist, but still feels believable.

Turn a film scene into a spatial idea: take the mood of Parasite, Dune, The Grand Budapest Hotel, The Truman Show, Blade Runner 2049 or Playtime and translate it into a collage, small model, sound map or material palette.

Build a threshold: use cardboard, fabric, packaging, tape, photography or a quick digital model to test a doorway, curtain, screen, corridor, stair, window or in-between space.

Make a material story: collect or photograph textures from your everyday environment, then arrange them into a palette that suggests calm, tension, ritual, comfort, speed, care or play.

Invent a tiny public space for one action: waiting, hiding, meeting, eating, reading, displaying, listening or watching. Test it with a sketch, collage, model, Rhino, SketchUp or Blender.

Use AI carefully as a prompt, not a final answer: generate or collect an atmosphere, then redraw, collage, edit or critique it. What feels useful? What feels false? What would you change?

A playful test, an unfinished collage or a strange little model can be more valuable than something polished. Do not be afraid of doing it wrong. For this kind of summer exploration, wrong can be interesting.

EXPLORE TOOLS

You do not need to buy any paid software before starting the course. Once you join the School, you will have free access to Rhino, Adobe tools such as Photoshop, and many other specialist design programmes. Over the summer, use these links only if you feel curious. Free tools and simple experiments are completely fine for collage, image-making, modelling and play.

Tools you meet on the course

Rhino: Rhino offers a 90-day evaluation, which can be useful if you want to explore 3D modelling before you arrive. Do not buy Rhino before starting the course. Rhino helps designers think spatially: you can test volume, proportion, thresholds, furniture, circulation, surfaces and the relationship between parts before an idea becomes fixed. A simple model can become a plan, section, perspective, diagram, rendered view or 3D-printed object. Use it, if you want, as a way of asking spatial questions, not as something you need to master.



Rhino 90-day evaluation: optional trial access if you want to explore before joining the course.

<https://www.rhino3d.com/en/docs/guides/licensing/90-day-evaluation/>

How to Rhino: Rhino and Grasshopper workflows in architecture, including modelling, parametric thinking and presentation workflows.

<https://youtube.com/@howtorhino?si=fgCmA-tck3PzxqZF>

The Rhino Essentials: Rhino modelling basics, architectural modelling and general workflow.

<https://youtube.com/@therhinoessentials?si=Rm-H2PdR0WGEml9>

Image-making and collage: You do not need to buy Photoshop before starting the course. Once you join the School, you will have free access to Photoshop and other Adobe tools. For summer experiments, Photopea is the most useful free alternative because it works in the browser and uses a familiar layer-based logic. It is enough for trying collage, masking, image manipulation, texture, atmosphere and visual storytelling. What matters is not the software name, but the habit of image-making: layering photographs, drawings, textures, people, objects, text, scans and digital

The most important thing is not software mastery. A careful sketch, thoughtful collage or curious observation can be more valuable than a polished digital image with no clear idea behind

images to test atmosphere, scale, material, occupation and story. Collage helps designers communicate ideas before everything is fixed. It can make a proposal feel possible, strange, playful, atmospheric or critical.

Photopea: free browser-based image editing and collage, useful as a Photoshop alternative before you have School access.

<https://www.photopea.com/>

Photopea Learn: tutorials and guides for layers, selections, masks, retouching, text and effects.

<https://www.photopea.com/learn/>

AI-assisted visualisation: useful for testing atmospheres and ideas, but always with care and critical judgement. Treat AI images as prompts for thinking, not as finished design work.

<https://firefly.adobe.com/>

<https://chatgpt.com/>



Other accessible tools to try, if you want to play

SketchUp Free / SketchUp getting started: simple 3D modelling and quick spatial tests.

<https://help.sketchup.com/en/sketchup/getting-started-sketchup>

Blender: free 3D modelling, rendering and visualisation.

<https://www.blender.org/support/tutorials/>

GIMP: free and open-source image editing software with beginner tutorials.

<https://www.gimp.org/tutorials/>

Krita: free and open-source digital painting and illustration software, useful for textures, drawings and image experiments.

<https://krita.org/en/>

Inkscape: free vector drawing for diagrams, graphics and layout tests.

<https://inkscape-manuals.readthedocs.io/>



Drawing basics

Plans, sections and elevations: a useful introduction to orthographic drawing.

<https://fontanarchitecture.com/plan-section-elevation/>

Perspective drawing: a simple starting point for thinking about horizon lines, vanishing points and spatial depth.

<https://www.sketchlikeanarchitect.com/blog/design-concept-development-and-perspective-drawing>

BRING SOMETHING WITH YOU

At the end of the summer, choose one thing from this pack to bring into your first conversations at the School. It might be a sketch, photograph, comparison, object, material sample, quick collage, small model, place you visited, film scene that stayed with you, or a question you could not stop thinking about.

It does not need to be polished. It does not need to be correct. It only needs to show that you have started looking carefully, following your curiosity and noticing what inspires you.

We are really looking forward to welcoming you to the School and seeing what you bring with you: **your** references, interests, questions, experiences and **ways of looking at the world.**

Start small. Keep it yours. Bring something that helps us begin a conversation.