



Lighting and Color in Upscale Interior Design

Arshawn Roohian and Jennifer Samson
Laguna Beach High School, Authentic Exploratory Research



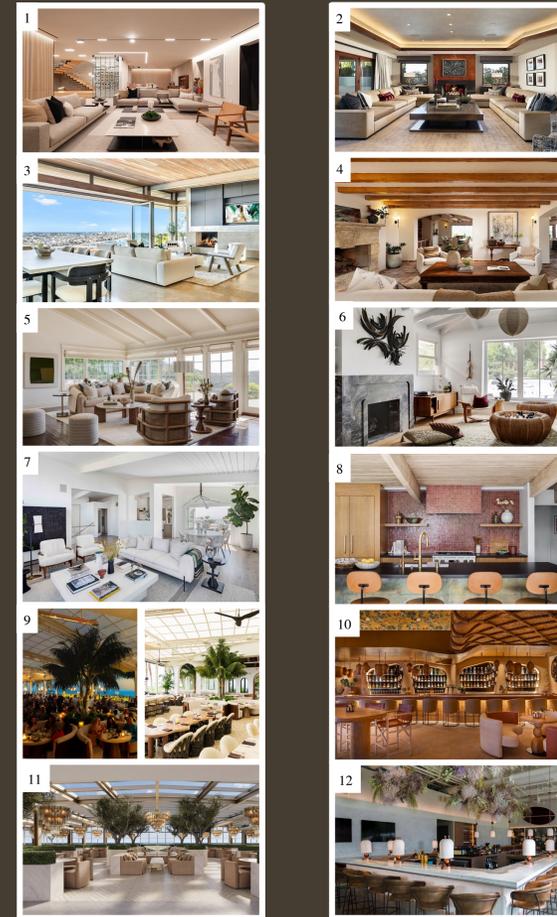
INTRODUCTION

Interior design is more than just visual appeal—it is a powerful tool that highly influences human emotion, cognition, and behavior through intentional spatial and sensory cues. This research explores how the strategic use of color and lighting in interior design influences psychological responses in two distinct settings: residential and hospitality environments. By analyzing professionally designed upscale spaces throughout southern Orange County, this study investigates how design choices affect mood and behavior—whether encouraging intimacy and relaxation at home, or social and sensory stimulation in restaurants and public venues. Drawing from both qualitative observations and environmental psychology, this research highlights how interior environments are not just backdrops to life, but key factors in changing how people feel, think, and interact.

As a mental health advocate and aspiring architect, I hope to find the most efficient ways to design spaces that best support emotional well-being, spaces that don't just look good, but feel good to be in, where every color, light source, and material has a deeper purpose in helping people feel safe, connected, and at ease.

DATA AND FINDINGS

	Location	Setting Type	Lighting Type	Color Palette	Key Materials	Spatial Layout	Intended Mood	Evidence
1	Oriole Dr	Residential	Natural + Warm LED	Muted earth tones	Wood, stone, fabric	Open, breathable	Focused, calm, luxurious	Realtor, mentor
2	Roxbury Rd	Residential	Ambient + Indirect	Beige, light greys, natural wood	Soft fabrics, glass, wood	Symmetrical, conversation-oriented	Cozy, luxurious, grounded	Realtor, mentor
3	Dolphin Ter	Residential	Natural + Ambient + Direct	Ivory, light wood, grey, concrete	Upholstery, glass, natural materials	Expansive, panoramic, open	Uplifted, focused, calm	Realtor, mentor
4	Nyes Pl	Residential	Wall Sconces + Natural	Earth tones, soft whites, terracotta, wood	Exposed beams, stone fireplace, woven textures	Open plan, traditional furnishings	Cozy, grounded, calm	Realtor, mentor
5	Temple Hills Dr	Residential	Ambient + Natural	Soft neutrals, natural textures, blue accents	Wood, texture, natural fabrics	Open, indirect lighting, large windows	Calm, uplifted, welcomed	Mentor, client
6	Locust St	Residential	Warm Lighting + Natural (no recessed)	Neutrals with dark contrast, burgundy, leopard	Wood, marble, metal, textiles	Vaulted ceiling, open plan, minimal overhead lighting	Grounded, cozy, calm	Mentor, client
7	Capistrano Ave	Residential	Natural + Ambient + Indirect	Soft neutrals, dark wood, black accents	Textured textiles, white oak flooring, natural wood accents	Open concept with clear zoning between lounge and dining	Serene, bright, airy, relaxed	Mentor, client
8	Center St	Residential	Ambient + Natural	Deep red, natural wood, warm leather	Mosaic tile, wood, patina island	Open with emphasis on decorations	Welcomed, cozy, energetic	Mentor, client
9	Javier's Newport Beach	Hospitality	Natural (day), 2500K Ambient (evening)	Earth tones: beige, brown, cream, black	Wood, stone, glass, greenery	Open at day, intimate at night	Energetic, calm, overstimulated	Design team, literature review, mentor
10	Palmilla Cocina y Tequila	Hospitality	2200K-2800K, Ambient + Natural	Terracotta, blush, deep brown, sand tones	Straw, stucco, wood, leather	Dynamic, curvilinear w/ accents	Energetic, luxurious, grounded	Literature review, mentor
11	RH Ocean Grill	Hospitality	Natural (day), Chandeliers + 2200-2700K Accent (night)	Beige, taupe, brown, cream	Marble, wood, greenery, textiles	Open air by day, layered lighting by night	Calm, uplifted, luxurious	Literature review, mentor
12	Solstice Kitchen & Bar	Hospitality	Natural + Warm Pendants	Caramel leather, natural wood, stone, blue, purple, green accents	Leather, wood, glass, dried greenery	Open floor plan w/ defined seating zones, bar and booth symmetry	Energetic, welcomed, focused	Literature review, mentor



CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

This research confirms that interior design choices—specifically lighting, color, and materials—have a great impact on human mood and behavior. Residential spaces tended to prioritize calm, comfort, and clarity through natural materials and soft lighting, while hospitality environments leaned into bold contrasts and layered lighting to energize or impress users. However, overlaps do exist. Some hospitality projects, like RH Ocean Grill, used calming, home-like qualities, while residential spaces like Center St. took risks with dramatic palettes and materials. This suggests that emotional impact in design is not tied to setting type alone, but to how the different elements are combined. This study could expand by including interviews, surveys, or cognitive data to support observed emotional reactions. Designers can use these findings to intentionally blend comfort and stimulation, and create the most efficient designs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This study analyzed 12 total spaces: 4 residential and 4 hospitality interiors were randomly selected using a number generator from a pool of 20 each. An additional 4 residential projects from Jen Samson Design were purposefully and personally selected for their thoughtful integration of mood-enhancing design elements. Each site was observed in person, focusing on lighting type and temperature, color palette, materials, and spatial layout to understand how these elements influence mood, comfort, and behavior.

To interpret psychological responses, a consistent emotional framework was applied across all observations. Seven mood categories were developed to describe the intended emotional effect of each space: **calm, grounded, uplifted, luxurious, cozy, energetic, welcomed, focused, serene, bright, airy, overstimulated, and relaxed.**

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Residential spaces consistently relied on natural and ambient lighting to promote calmness, comfort, and clarity.

1231 Dolphin Ter: Layered lighting paired with open layout enhanced feelings of focus and openness.
965 Capistrano Ave: Indirect natural light created a bright, relaxed mood throughout the day.
4512 Roxbury Rd: Indirect ceiling lighting helped establish a cozy, grounded, and conversation-driven space.

Hospitality spaces used more dramatic, layered lighting to enhance stimulation and flexibility.

Javier's Newport Beach: Cool daylight transitions into moody ambient lighting in the evening.
Palmilla Cocina y Tequila: Accent lighting highlights textures and creates dynamic movement.
Solstice Kitchen & Bar: Warm pendants promoted intimacy, supporting a welcoming and energetic atmosphere.

Residential interiors used muted, soft neutrals and earthy tones to evoke calm, grounded moods.

791 Nyes Pl: Terracotta and soft whites combined with natural lighting to feel grounded and safe.
1000 Oriole Dr: Muted earth tones supported focus and luxury in an open, breathable space.

Hospitality designs featured bold contrasts, saturated hues, or rich textures to energize or impress.

545 Center St (residential, acted as an outlier): Used deep red and patina leather for a more energetic tone.
Palmilla: Terracotta and blush tones created warmth while energizing the space.
Solstice: Caramel leather and pops of blue and green brought in contrast without ruining the vibe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/REFERENCES

Special thanks to Jen Samson Design, Mr. Shen, RH Ocean Grill, Javier's Newport Beach, Palmilla Newport Beach, and Solstice Irvine.



Full Research Paper:

