Discipline

Multisensory design

Designs objects, spaces and services with all the senses in mind at once, and how they influence each other, instead of designing only for the eyes.



In Spanish

Diseño multisensorial

Origin

Fenko, Schifferstein and Hekkert (2008); Spence (2020)

What it deals with

Design is usually conceived for the eyes, but people experience things with their whole body. What is heard, touched or smelled also changes how something is perceived and valued.

Principles

The senses mix

Light can make a place feel warmer, and sound can make it feel safer. What one sense picks up changes what the others perceive.

Everything tells the same story

When what is seen, heard and touched fits together, it is easier to understand and usually more liked.

Each moment, its sense

Sight matters most when choosing a product; with use, touch, hearing or smell gain weight.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Check how what you design sounds, feels to the touch and smells, not just how it looks.

✗ Avoid

Signals that contradict each other, such as calm music with a stimulating scent.

Don't fall for it

More stimuli is not better: too many at once overwhelm, especially people with sensory sensitivity.

Methods and tools



Method

Mood board

A board of images, colors and textures that sets the tone of a project before designing it.

Connections

Builds on

- Gastrophysics
- Sonification
- Sensation transference

Related to

- Audiovisual design
- Color, material and finish (CMF) design
- Experience design
- Spatial design
- Inclusive design
- Sound design

Authors and works

2008	**Anna Fenko, Hendrik Schifferstein and Paul Hekkert**	Asked 120 people about their products and found that sight dominates at purchase, but other senses become more important with use.
2020	**Charles Spence**	Reviewed research on how the senses combine and proposed using it to design spaces, beyond the visual.
2018	**Ellen Lupton and Andrea Lipps**	Gathered, in a Cooper Hewitt exhibition and book, the work of those who design for touch, hearing, smell and taste.

Sources

Original sources

- Fenko, A., Schifferstein, H. N. J., & Hekkert, P. (2008). Which senses dominate at different stages of product experience? In Undisciplined! Proceedings of the Design Research Society Conference 2008. Sheffield Hallam University. View source (https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers/drs2008/researchpapers/19)

- Camere, S., Schifferstein, H. N. J., & Bordegoni, M. (2018). From abstract to tangible: Supporting the materialization of experiential visions with the Experience Map. International Journal of Design, 12(2), 51–73. View source (https://ijdesign.org/index.php/IJDesign/article/view/2825)

Academic reviews

- Spence, C. (2020). Senses of place: Architectural design for the multisensory mind. Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications, 5, 46. View source (https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-020-00243-4)

Secondary sources

- Lupton, E., & Lipps, A. (Eds.) (2018). The senses: Design beyond vision. Princeton Architectural Press; Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

Last reviewed: October 29, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.