

FEATURE STORIES



Feng Shui: Beyond Sustainable So, what is Feng Shui, and why should I care?

by Maureen Calamia | posted August 2008

Many of the principles of Feng Shui are inherently within the sustainable building movement: namely, treading lightly on the Earth and using her resources wisely. However, there is a significant part of Feng Shui that is often missing from typical green designs. This wisdom can be integrated into sustainable-design practices to enrich human beings through better physical and psychological health.

Why You Should Care

Feng Shui affects you every moment of your life, whether you realize it or not. The Feng Shui of your home, your workplace, your dentist's office, your child's school, and your local Motor Vehicle office impact the quality of your energy and how you experience life in those places.

The principles of Feng Shui state that you are always under the influence of universal energies, or chi. The Chinese describe energies as being yin (passive) or yang (active). For harmony to exist, and therefore, health and well-being, the energies need to be in balance. Negative chi, or energy that is out of balance, contributes to stress, depression, and illness. Negative chi can affect you consciously—such as the stress of being in a traffic jam on the way home from work—or subconsciously—such as the stress you will experience as you sit with your back to the office door. This form of subconscious stress grows and accumulates throughout your day. A poorly laid out office plan with sharp angles, a darkly lit entrance to your home, and clutter piled up in your foyer will add stress subconsciously and, with repeated exposure, can lead to depression and illness.

The World Health Organization cites stress as a global epidemic. "Chronic . . . (stress) is potentially very destructive and can deprive people of physical and mental health, and at times, even of life itself," wrote Cyralene P. Bryce in *Stress Management in Disasters* (Pan American Organization). According to the International Feng Shui Guild, Feng Shui seeks to reduce stress in the environment by designing spaces that prioritize the health of humans and our absolute need for nature and balance.

What is Feng Shui?

Thousands of years ago, ancient people lived in harmony with their environment. Feng Shui, and other similar cultural philosophies around the world, was practiced intuitively and enriched the lives of the people.

Using the natural movement of chi, the polarities of yin and yang, the five Chinese elements, and the Bagua (a map based on astronomy and calendars), Feng Shui principles can create a more holistic space that nurtures physical and psychological health and well-being.

Feng Shui is the ancient equivalent to environmental psychology. It focuses on the interplay between humans and their surroundings. In the realm of brain functionality, our modern minds are overwhelmed with left-brain activities: logic,

conscious, and linear thinking. Feng Shui works on a right-brain level: simultaneous, intuitive, and subconscious. Because of this, Feng Shui is considered more of an art than a science and, in order to practice Feng Shui, one needs to exercise the right-brain functions. Meditation and yoga are great ways to accomplish this.

Feng Shui incorporates principles of nature: proportions, flow of chi, and color relationships. When placed within a symmetrically shaped building, people inherently feel more comfortable. Some ratio examples are the Golden Rectangle, credited to Leonardo de Vinci, and the Golden Mean, a beautiful pattern of spirals which nature gloriously displays in flowers, seashells, and even the human body.

There are no straight lines in nature. Light waves and water currents move in curves. Energy moves in curves. People do not naturally walk in a straight line. An interesting study on a college campus observed the walking patterns of students and faculty after a snowstorm. Instead of following the straight walkways, they meandered through the campus, as a stream meanders through a landscape. Curves are much more natural and, therefore, make us feel more comfortable. The colors used in our interior spaces are most comfortable when they mimic the natural environment. Darker floors echo the forest floor, medium colors for walls mimic buildings and distant landscapes, and light-colored ceilings represent the sky.

I've Got a House with a Missing Wealth Area!

Often, clients and people say to me "I have this or that in my house. It's awful! I should do something about it, right?" They say that some feature in their home is bad Feng Shui, according to a book they've read. What I tell them is this: Feng Shui is a tool to empower us, not judge us. It's a tool to help us be in the light, feel comfort, safety, and peace, and be in balance. There is no such thing as "bad Feng Shui" (although my son will claim that I use those words when his bedroom is a mess). Feng Shui is not supposed to make us feel like we are missing something, or that what we have isn't right.

There are few rules in Feng Shui. What is good for some may be not great for others, and vice versa. A house that has many levels may be very trying for someone who has difficulty with ambition, decision-making, and self-confidence. For others this house might be a great environment.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when looking at your space: Who resides here? Who works here? What is the quality of their energy? What is the primary purpose of the space? What type of energy is best for this space? Is it working for us, or not? Feng Shui is an art as well as a science, so it's flexible and intuitive. There are no lists of rules, black and white. It's all relative.

The most important thing to realize is how you feel in a space. Although that sounds easy to ascertain, it's not as easy as you think. You need to relax and quiet yourself. Reflect on how you feel whenever you walk into that space. Imagine that you are there. Are you upset, stressed, tired, hungry, confused, happy, at peace? This is what Feng Shui is all about: getting down to feelings.

Still, it's very difficult to be objective. A Feng Shui consultant rarely does his or her own Feng Shui. It's difficult to see through fresh eyes.

If you are like many people, you are probably stressed much of the time. I can't underscore how important it is for people now, more than ever, to have their home and workspace reviewed and brought into alignment with their energy.

So . . . "Beyond Green?"

Feng Shui is the original "green living and design" movement. Nowadays, these new disciplines of green building and sustainable design are concerned primarily with the Earth, energy efficiency, and water management. Feng Shui creates a more holistic approach by bringing in the concept of the human element and psychological well-being. Whether they're newly constructed LEED-certified or Energy Star buildings or existing structures, the lives of those who reside and work in them can be enhanced by incorporating ancient Feng Shui principles.

Some architects understand the power of Feng Shui. Some have become Feng-Shui certified, while others work with Feng Shui consultants on their designs. From health-care facilities to office parks and residences, Feng Shui is enhancing the lives of people in the West at a rate greater than ever before. It's vital that this "green" movement not only continues to grow into the mainstream, but that Feng Shui principles are integrated to create healthy buildings in every sense of the word.

Tao de Ching of Lao Tzu, 42:

Nonbeing gives birth to the oneness
The oneness gives birth to yin and yang,
Yin and yang give birth to heaven, earth,
and beings,
Heaven, earth, and beings give birth to
everything in existence

Therefore everything in existence carries
within it both yin and yang, and attains
its harmony by blending together
these two vital breaths

And honors nature—
Not by decree, but by being.

Tao gives life to all beings.
Nature watches over them,
develops them,
shelters them,
nurses them,
grows them,
ripens them,
completes them,
buries them,
and returns them.

Tao de Ching of Lao Tzu, 51:

Tao gives life to all beings.
Nature nourishes them.
Fellow creatures shape them.
Circumstances complete them.

Everything in existence respects Tao

Giving birth,
nourishing life,
shaping things without possessing them,
serving without expectation of reward,
leading without dominating:
These are the profound virtues of nature,
and of nature's best beings.

Feng Shui Resources

Websites:

The International Feng Shui Guild: Sign up for a free monthly Feng Shui E-Zine, a Feng Shui consultant directory, and Feng Shui schools; learn about Feng Shui and its related disciplines through news, lectures and workshops, articles, and books. ifsguild.org

The Feng Shui Society: Feng Shui news, how Feng Shui is used in different environments, and interesting articles and links. fengshuisociety.org

Books:

Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine, by Harriet Beinfield, L.Ac, and Efrem Korngold, L. Ac, O.M.D. (Ballantine Wellspring 1991)

Feng Shui Revealed, by R.D. Chin (Random House, 1998)

Feng Shui for Dummies, by David Daniel Kennedy (Hungry Minds, 2001)

Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui, by Karen Kingston (Broadway, 1999)

Creating Sacred Spaces with Feng Shui, by Karen Kingston (Broadway, 1997)

Sacred Space, by Denise Linn (Ballantine, 1995)

The Feng Shui Handbook: A Practical Guide to Chinese Geomancy and Environmental Harmony, by Derek Walters (Thorsons, 1995)

Living Color, by Sarah Rossbach (Kodansha, 1994)

A Guide to the I-Ching, by Carol Anthony (Anthony Publishing, 1988)

WIKIPEDIA DEFINITIONS OF SIMILAR DISCIPLINES

Sustainable/Green Design:

The needed aim of sustainable design is to produce places, products, and services in a way that reduces use of non-renewable resources, minimizes environmental impact, and relates people with the natural environment.

Ecological Living:

Ecological living is a life philosophy. Proponents of ecological living aim to conduct their lives in such a way that they have an all-encompassing awareness of Earth and its processes. Each choice made under such a way of life requires consideration of the consequences of the choice, and the way that the decision will affect the environment and all living things within it.

Environmental Design:

Environmental design is generally understood to describe design activities focused on the natural environment and sustainability as well as concern with the planned environment that humans build . . . individuals associated with the field

are interested in better understanding the relationships between people and their environment so that this knowledge can be applied to problematic real-world situations.

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