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A RARE INTERVIEW WITH THE
ACADEMY AWARD WINNER AS SHE
PUSHES THE ENVELOPE IN *THE BRAVE ONE*

Long Time, No Chi

With herbs, alcohol, flowers, and feathers, feng shui expert Judith Wendell gets a 23-year-old house in order.

by Lois Weiss

WHEN FENG SHUI consultant Judith Wendell walked into her married client's peach-colored master bedroom, she sensed bad vibes and became concerned. Wendell explained to her that while "peach blossom luck," i.e., enhanced success with the opposite sex brought about by painting a bedroom peach, does exist in feng shui, a peach hue can also affect a *marriage* in negative, harmful ways. Through her tears, Wendell's client then confided that, though her husband had broken off a recent affair, at one time he'd actually brought the girl into their own bedroom.

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Through her tears, Wendell's client then confided that, though her husband had broken off a recent affair, at one time he'd actually brought the girl into their own peach-colored bedroom.

It was all in a day's work for the owner of the feng shui company Sacred Currents, who's part interior decorator, part psychologist, and part ancient Chinese spiritual advisor. Feng shui is best known for its focus on furniture placement, which gives residents "command" of their rooms. But when it came time for my own home of 23 years to undergo an overhaul, I learned that there was much more to the approach than heavy lifting.

I spent the night before the big day arranging bouquets of flowers and choosing bowls and other items with special meaning for the ceremony that Wendell would be performing. The following day we put water in each bowl and I floated flow-

ers and petals around a white votive. We placed the bowls in key areas of the house—the floor of the garage, my bedroom—to anchor my "intentions" into each spot and into my life.

Meanwhile, Wendell, who was born in the Bronx, grew up in Queens, and lived in hippie-era San Francisco for a time, trooped around with her dowsing rod (a device used to detect everything from water to spirits) and a compass. She politely observed that our house looked sunken and needed better chi (energy). The new Colonial homes on either side dwarfed our pitiful little ranch, and Wendell suggested a weathervane to lift its mood.

Back inside, we took cinnabar (to safeguard the house from bad influences) and realgar (to defend against burglaries and bodily harm) and mixed them with drops of high-proof alcohol. As I stirred with my fingers, Wendell directed me to concentrate on wishes and prayers for myself, my family, and my career. I felt empowered against random home invasions.

Then we "sealed" the doors and drains in the house by dabbing a tiny amount of the red mixture in strategic places. We also put drops on family photos to "clear" them, then burned those representing bad memories in the barbecue. After adding rice to the bowl, we dipped our fingers in, then threw the potion around the property for good vibes and "to raise the chi of the family and the house," as Wendell put it, adding that the ceremony was the historical basis for throwing rice at newlyweds. We then soaked some rooster feathers (considered powerful in feng shui circles) with the rice and alcohol, placed each in a red envelope, and put them in my car,

in my desk, and near my bed for protection.

Wendell burned resin and charcoal, lit incense, and chanted as she walked from room to room. She moved light items of furniture, artwork, tchotchkes, and mirrors around, allowing me to see what comes and goes into each room and why it's important that the layout be light and airy. We also rang bells throughout the house, and Wendell tied a heavy one onto the front door and hung another string over the stove. "The bells break up negative or stagnant chi and are cleansing," she said.

At the end of the session, Wendell left me with notes describing the best positions for desks and beds, and a list of items to buy—a red sheet to go between the box spring and mattress of our bed, a mirror for "command" of our driveway, and a crystal lighting fixture to direct chi into each room from our awkward entryway. Overwhelming? Yes. But ultimately a satisfying experience for me and my home.

"It does get to be a blur after the bells and the smoke," says Wendell. "You get cleansed in the process. It's a lot to take in—and there's more to cleanse out." [G]

