

INSIDE CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

Incorporating Feng Shui principals into building design

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Feng Shui is the Chinese art and science that has to do with uniting people and places. Living in harmony with nature has always been the practical necessity of people everywhere. All species in their own innate way, know that the environment determines their survival. You might say that feng shui is the original environmental impact statement.

Science has proven that all things (seen and unseen, animate and inanimate) are interconnected and made up of the same substance. Thus, it stands to reason that the environments in which we live and work influence the quality of our lives.

Today, feng shui addresses how the environment affects our success, health, reputations, and relationships. Using the tools of feng shui, with sensitivity and knowledge, there is the potential to make improvements in each area of our lives and businesses. So you ask, tell me how to approach a 50-story multi use building in the middle of New York using feng shui?

There are no longer any undesirable neighborhoods in Manhattan, but location is a very important factor in feng shui. The reason being, that in order to start to create 'good' feng shui the building has to gather and generate 'chi' the Chinese word for 'energy'. An ideally sited building would be in what is called the 'arm chair position'. That means it has a 'mountain' (or in a city, a building) behind it for protection as well as other smaller buildings to the right and left. Since views are so important we would not want these buildings too close or too tall. In ancient times siting a house halfway down a mountain with a full view of the valley offered the tenant protection or what is known as a 'commanding position'.

Balance of Yin and Yang – passive and active factors is another important feng shui concept. If your project is the tallest building in an area, it is gathering chi from all directions. If surrounding buildings dwarf your site, other means for drawing 'chi' are needed. One way to accomplish this is with light. Light shining up from the roof projects the building's energy far and wide. A well-lit entrance 'wakes up' the chi and invites it in. Having a stronger presence on the street then your neighbors whether that is with

an awning, signage, or building projection, all create a footing to pull in energy and 'feed' your environment. A healthy (read 'successful') building is more yang than yin – more alive, vibrant and active. No surprise!

Along with enhancing the 'chi' of a building there are always factors to avoid or at least mitigate if they are unavoidable. One such factor is referred to as 'sha chi' or sometimes called a 'poison arrow'. This is a sharp angle directed straight at a building from another one that is next to it or across the street. Another form of 'sha chi' is created from oncoming traffic.

A perfect example is the Trump International Hotel at Columbus Circle. The traffic pattern coming around the circle and off Central Park South all point toward the Trump building on its way to Broadway. As many are familiar, Donald Trump has used feng shui principles in his projects for decades. The reflective surface of the silver globe at the offended corner is intended to deflect the energy of the oncoming traffic and thus 'protects' the building.

This crossroad of NYC has a few interesting feng shui factors. Firstly, Trump coming to Columbus Circle initially raised the chi of an area that was blight. Renovating the long neglected fountain immediately energized the area. The element 'water' is associated with money and cash flow. AOL turned up on the scene and I for one was not surprised to see that their beautiful design directed sha chi toward the Trump building.

Now if it were not for Columbus and his fountain the AOL complex would have their own problem, that being the fact that they are located at end of a T intersection.

Talk about sha chi ... they would be taking a direct hit from the traffic traveling west along Central Park South. But instead the entire AOL complex takes every advantage of the fountain and was literally designed around it. Of course

Central Park itself is the heart of New York. So both the Trump and AOL sites pull in enormous healthy chi from it.

Feng shui's popularity in the West is understandable when seen in the context of the growing acceptance and desire for alternative health care. Taking responsibility for one's physical body and environment (our greater body) offers some security for our well-being. It is little known that feng shui is based in the same theories and practice as traditional Chinese medicine – that being the 5 Elements or sometimes called the 5 Transformations. In feng shui the elements of water, wood, fire, earth and metal are considered to be agents of change. Emphasizing one or two elements while balancing an environment with the others is an important aspect in the practice

of feng shui.

Each element can be represented by its color, shape, material or image. For instance, WOOD can be used in a building as trees and plants, wood flooring and furniture and in shades of green, as well as by vertical and rectangular shapes. WATER is represented by the colors blue and black, undulating shapes, anything with movement, actual water and water images. FIRE is red, upwardly moving, heat, and actual fire. Why would you want to have these elements you ask? WOOD fosters new beginnings and growth, FIRE ~ recognition, WATER ~ money, EARTH ~ relationship and METAL ~ benefactors, to name just a few of their potentialities.

These principles can be applied to any style or period. One of the biggest misconceptions about feng shui is that it is limited to an Asian style. Incorporating feng shui principles into the design of a building, adds to the project's success as well as making a positive difference to the people who move into those environments. Public awareness of feng shui is continually growing and in turn, people are appreciating and looking for the benefits it has to offer. ■

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