



Optimal Flow

We may no longer find it hard to pronounce, but it's still easy to underestimate the power and complexity of feng shui. *By Andrea Renshoff*

Feng shui has made its way into everyday speech. We sometimes hear it used casually as a verb, e.g., “We really need to feng shui our kitchen.” Or as an adjective, as in “This relaxation room has a feng shui vibe.” Such vague remarks tend to reduce this ancient Chinese art/science to the shuffling of a few sticks of furniture—and do it a great disservice. Applied properly, the philosophy and practices of feng shui can nurture health, happiness and success.

To understand feng shui, start with the name. “Feng” (“wind”) and “shui” (“water”) are two elements associated with good health and fortune in Chinese culture. The Chinese recognize the inherent energy that exists in land and space, and ancient societies believed that the fate of their people depended upon it. Therefore, feng shui was used to determine settlement sites, taking into account everything from water flow to mountain formations.

Today, a growing number of developers, architects and designers use feng shui to create external environments capable of effecting powerful internal changes in human beings. It's no surprise therefore that feng shui is considered a crucial component in the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

THE ROAD MAP

Feng shui is a deepening of the understanding that internal and external environments are not two separate

things, but rather are always connected via the flow of *chi*, or life energy. This balance and flow of *chi* is at the core of feng shui, much like it's at the core of acupuncture practice, wherein vital energy is directed to areas inside the body that need healing or unblocking. In feng shui, an environment's shape, light, design, color, materials and setting are all deliberately selected to manipulate *chi*.

Overarching factors, such as the importance of yin and yang (or polarity) balance, and the use of the five elements—wood, water, earth, fire and metal—must also be considered when seeking to optimize a space using feng shui.

If it sounds complicated, that's because it is. What's more, one size doesn't fit all. To be effective, feng shui applications must be customized to individual need. As Judith Wendell, founder of New York-based feng shui consultancy Sacred Currents (sacredcurrents.com) explains, “Unless it's specific, it can just become generic nonsense.”

Feng shui consultants draw on wisdom handed down for generations. An environment is oriented using two tools: the **compass** and the **bagua**.

The compass, or *luo pan* (“*luo*” meaning “everything” and “*pan*” meaning “bowl”) uses direction, such as which way a building faces, to empower energy patterns. This idea can be used figuratively as well: “We may also look at someone's *ming gua*, a personal direction based on their birthday,” says Wendell.

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