

earth, wind, & fire

feng shui will bring the elements into your living room, streamline your home's chi, and even help de-clutter your mind.

By Robert Zeliger

if you are like me, you can't tell your yin from your yang, or your chi from your- well let's just say you can't use the word chi in a sentence—then chances are you probably scoff at the whole notion of feng shui. The idea that you can change your prosperity, emotional well-being, and even love life by shifting a few dressers in your room and repainting the walls seems a bit out there. But there are legions of feng shui die-hards and many of them have stories of lives readjusted, careers energized, and even families started. "I've gotten some people pregnant" says *Jennifer Ellen Frank, a consultant from Manhattan*. (www.jenniferfrank.com). Clearly, there is something to the practice. And, given its visibility today- it seems like every other home on MTV's *Cribs* features a "prosperity corner" – the discipline has definitely breached the walls of our culture zeitgeist to become a full-on trend. All over Rockland, from Harbor's at Haverstraw's yang-promoting outdoor fountains to the plants populating every Nyack day spa, you can see its influence. Indeed feng shui consultants have become as plentiful in the region as Starbucks.

How does Feng shui work? For starters, know that it's properly pronounced "fung shway". The term literally means "wind and water" and the idea behind it is that through arranging the space around you, you can achieve harmony with nature and inner harmony as well. By placing items like furniture, plants, and fountains strategically, you can create a positive energy flow, or chi. Still, it's hard to simplify a concept that is over 4,000 years old, which is why so many residents have turned to decorators like *Jennifer Ellen Frank, who help decode feng shui's details*. Trying to wrap your head around the complexities of feng shui can be dizzying, which is why professional consultants have built a career in the past few years to meet the needs of desperate homeowners.

Ideally your office should demonstrate that you're a confident employee with a sense of inner peace, but does yours look more like the home of a disorganized college co-ed, complete with the full collection of Absolut vodka ads pinned to your bulletin board? If the answer to any of these was yes, feng shui, its practitioners swear, can help.

FENG SHUI A-B-CHI'S

There are different schools of feng shui with differing schools of feng shui with differing interpretations, but several basic tenets apply to all. Below is a guide to some of the more important concepts:

CHI: At the center of the discipline is the concept of chi, a life force or spiritual energy that is given off by nature. The idea is to orient the spaces around us- rooms, landscapes, hallways—in order to best capture the flow of chi.

The Five Elements: Those would be earth, fire, water, metal, and wood. The goal is to balance these elements in particular settings in order to create a balance in your life. So, for example, you wouldn't want a kitchen that is completely made of stainless steel- because that would indicate extreme imbalance.

The Bagua: Often shown as an octagonal diagram, think of it as a map of feng shui. Different parts of the bagua correlate with aspects of your life, including compassion, love, empowerment, health and wisdom. And it is used to determine which parts of your home or office fit into those various aspects.

Yin and Yang: They are two forces that are at the same time opposing and complimenting each other! Yin is the dark, damp, inward force (that is considered feminine); while yang is loud, busy, hyper, and considered masculine. The goal is to balance them.

FENG SHUI YOUR KITCHEN

For centuries the kitchen has been the symbolic center of community. It's a place that families gather around to receive nourishment. For that reason, it plays an important role in feng shui tradition. Here are a few tips on increasing the positive energy in the room.

- *In feng shui, mirrors play an important role, and it is not uncommon to see a mirror placed behind the stove in practicing homes. In China, consultant Jennifer Ellen Frank (www.jenniferfrank.com) explains abundance and prosperity are associated with the stove (representing community and health). A mirror represents an increased level of prosperity by doubling the area.*
- You also want to try to separate sink and stove as much as possible. The elements of fire and water clash with each other. If possible, keep enough counter space to break the appliances up.
- In an ideal feng shui home, the kitchen and bedrooms are far apart. The energy from the appliances creates disruptions between you and your spouse, or simply disrupts sleep. If your kitchen and bedroom are separated only by a wall, then it is important to make sure your bed isn't butting up against it.



FENG SHUI YOUR BEDROOM

The bedroom is meant to be the yin in this ever-increasing yang world. It's the place you go to turn inward and be intimate. It's the cocoon you sleep in and the place you greet each morning. It's also the place couples spend time in private in other words screw this one up and you've got problems.

- Everything about the room should scream intimate. The artwork on the walls should reflect images of romance and love. Create passion with pleasant smelling candles, flowers, comforters, sheets, warm colors.
- *It's important to embrace balance in this room—especially if you are trying to strengthen your relationship with your partner. So, for example, make sure there are two nightstands, flanking the bed, two dressers, even details like two candles, etc., says Jennifer Ellen Frank.*
- *Keep pictures of single people out of the room, says consultant Jennifer Ellen Frank, even if they are your loved ones. There's a place for them, but not in the room where you're supposed to celebrate being part of a couple. In the same vein, Jennifer councils her clients to remove pictures of their friends and relatives—or at least face them away from the bed. "You don't want them watching you have sex," she says.*
- The placement of the bed is of key importance. It should be facing the entrance. You want to be able to see who is entering the room.
- *The headboard is also an important consideration. It should be solid and wooden, which is optimal for creating a grounding force and encouraging restfulness. Metal headboards, says Frank, pull the energy into them and create tension while you're sleeping.*

There are plenty of skeptics out there who say it's the modern equivalent of snake oil. Could feng shui just be one giant placebo effect? If believers think strongly enough that something will change their lives then maybe their own willpower is making it happen. That explanation is dismissed by the millions of people who have embraced the ancient discipline. For them it has become a powerful tool and a way of focusing their energy. "After all, there may just be something to it."

