



Wind, water and chi

Can feng shui improve your life?

by Kelly Westhoff

Kristin Quade was feeling sluggish. “I felt tired. I would run out of steam. I wasn’t motivated,” she said. “I had this itty bitty little house. ... I was running my business out of my home as well. I felt like I was running up against boundaries. My office felt dark and heavy. It was not where I wanted to be and I wasn’t bringing in any new clients.” Something needed to change. Quade arranged to have nationally known feng shui consultant Carole Hyder evaluate her space.

Upon seeing Quade’s office, Hyder pointed out the problem: “I had giant bookshelves in the room and the books were looking over my shoulders when I worked,” Quade said. Books contain dialogues, descriptions and arguments. They chatter and distract. After evaluating the entire home Hyder suggested numerous fixes; one was to move Quade’s desk and convert her former office into storage space. It was a move, Quade admitted, she never would have envisioned. Yet it did the trick. “My new office got morning sun and it had a lovely view,” She said. “I was so happy ... I was thinking more clearly, I was working with my clients in a more solid way. The change happened quickly. It was amazing.”

What is feng shui?

Feng shui (pronounced fung shway) translates from Chinese as wind and water, and aims to find a balance between the two. Feng shui grew out of the ancient Chinese custom of filio piety (ancestor worship); the Chinese believed that if ancestors weren’t happy, they’d make their descendents’ lives miserable. Thus, much thought was put into finding the right place to bury the dead. A burial site with a breeze and view of water was considered ideal. Eventually these ideals were incorporated into designing homes and villages.

Feng shui is based on three main principles, Hyder said. First, everything has energy, or chi. Within its walls, a home holds the energy of its builders and predecessors. “Chi is like perfume,” Hyder said. “It filters through an environment in subtle ways. For example, if the previous tenants of a home went through a divorce, anger, heartbreak and resentment can linger in the air.”

Next, feng shui relies on the power of intention. Our thoughts create vibrations that course through our bodies and into our environment. Simply moving a desk from one wall to another will not bring a home office into balance. “Intention really is the key piece,” said Hyder, noting that positive thought is also important. “People always want more money,” she explained. “But what does that look

like? Security? Travel? College tuition? Enough to pay the bills? Sometimes money does come in a blatant way—an inheritance check—but usually it’s a realignment of the money you already have, like refinancing your home.”

Finally, practicing feng shui is understanding that your space reflects your life. “Your house really is a metaphor for your life,” Hyder explained. “People usually call me because they suspect their house is affecting them in some way.” Sometimes the problem is obvious to Hyder: “They say they’re feeling overwhelmed, they’ve got too much going on, and their space is filled with clutter.” Another common problem Hyder encounters is a home filled with taupe and tan walls, which the owners say are good for resale, yet they aren’t planning to move. This creates a disconnect between the home and the people living in it. “You really need to befriend your space,” she explained. “You should surround yourself with colors and things you love.”

Feng shui the western way

Hyder has grappled with the fact that she is a white woman practicing an Asian craft. “For many years, only men could practice feng shui. Here, now, it’s mainly women in the classes,” she said. Feng shui helps people live better, balanced lives, yet before it can do so, it needs to be understood. “In China, feng shui is often very symmetrical, very rigid,” Hyder explained. “But when it crossed shores, it softened. It’s about nesting and creating sanctuary and women are drawn to that. It’s something women naturally do.” For her own part, Hyder finds comfort in one particular aspect of feng shui: No home is a lost cause. She said there are always solutions to bring a home into balance.

In addition to practicing and writing about feng shui, Hyder teaches it. Her Wind and Water School of Feng Shui has certified more than 200 graduates. Not all are solely feng shui consultants; some are Realtors, architects, healers or interior designers like Julie Ann Segal. “I was able to see things energetically and to know how to adjust for that. I always



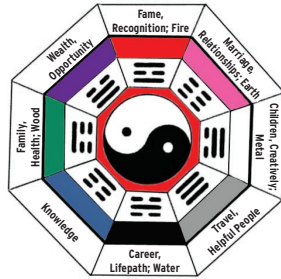
Carole Hyder

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had a sense of space as an interior designer, but I used my intuition," Segal explained. "The training strengthened my knowledge and gave me the confidence to place items or bring in colors in a specific way. And I met a network of wonderful and likeminded people."

Marketing herself as a combined interior designer and a feng shui consultant has been profitable for Segal, who says clients seek her out because of it. "They want to make sure I'm combining design with feng shui aesthetics," she explained. "They want me to use the bagua." The bagua is a feng shui map that is superimposed over an existing space to see which areas of a home correlate to certain concepts like wealth, knowledge, health and reputation. Using the bagua, Segal concentrates on bringing balance into a home by recommending specific wall finishes or art and accessories of a certain color.



A bagua is a feng shui map that helps bring balance into a home.

Laying the path

Carol Keyes needed the help of a feng shui consultant after getting married and moving to a new home. She felt swamped and she was having a hard time feeling at ease in her new space. Plus, things kept breaking down. "The car, the refrigerator, the washer and dryer. Money was flowing out of the house," she explained. "I wanted to live there, but there needed to be some changes. I really wanted to stop this flow of money out of the house. I had some health concerns, and I really wanted to feel comfortable," Keyes said.

The consultant "... gave us some real concrete, inexpensive things we could do in the house," she said. Keyes hung a crystal in the center of her space to assist her health concern. Two fireplaces in the home were burning money. To counteract this, she placed photographs of her honeymoon in the Caribbean on the mantles. The images of water cooled the fire, and therefore, the loss of money. Most important, however, Keyes wanted to feel at home. "We were having conflicts with our neighbors. They had owned our house before us. Next door was a vacant lot and they built a new house there, but it felt like they hadn't given up our house



EMILIE RICHARDSON

Interior designer Julie Ann Segal uses feng shui in her work.

yet," she said. "I hung a mirror in the window that faced the neighbors. Whenever they looked at our house, their vision would get reflected back at them."

Among her friends and family, there were a few naysayers, Keyes said. Yet most were curious and asked questions about her feng shui consultation, which she didn't mind. She had good news to report. "Some of the tasks brought almost immediate change," Keyes explained. "Some were gradual, like my health concern. It's ongoing, but it's improved. But it doesn't change with you being passive. You have to put forth the intention. Feng shui makes sure the energy is right. It makes sure the path is laid."

Kelly Westhoff is a freelance writer. After finishing this story, she hung a purple fish in the wealth corner of her office. See more of her work at www.kellywesthoff.com.

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feng shui basics

Nine ways to feng shui your space

Deal with clutter. Too much clutter is a sign that you have too many things to think about.

Use the front door. According to Carole Hyder, it's the "mouth of chi. Luck and good fortune come into your life through the front door."

Put a headboard on your bed; it symbolizes support and backing.

Face the door. Position your bed so that you can see the bedroom door from your pillow without putting your head squarely in its path. In your office, position your desk so that you face the door. Facing the door symbolizes sight.

Mirrors and sleep don't mix. If you must have a mirror in your bedroom, don't let it face the bed. The Chinese believe the soul leaves the body when sleeping. If it should glimpse itself in a mirror, it would grow confused.

No TV in the bedroom. It impacts sleep and can rob your dreams. "If you must have a TV in the room, cover the screen with a scarf before going to bed," Hyder advised.

Don't store books in your bedroom. Their opinions and stories interfere with your sleep. Restrict yourself to one book on your nightstand.

Every room should hold something that reminds you of nature: a plant, a window or a painting. Office cubicles often cry for a nature connection.

Every item in your home should be something you love or find useful. This clears clutter and deepens your connection to your space.