



Feng Shui for Everyday Life

At my annual redesign conference in Nashville recently, one of the workshops was on the ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui. I wanted to learn more about this topic, for my own education and to understand its possible application in my work. I was pleasantly surprised to realize that Feng Shui and interior redesign basically compliment each other, and was intrigued by some of its teachings.

One of the main principles of Feng Shui involves chi, or energy. Furniture, art and accessories are placed with the flow of chi in mind, so that energy is not blocked, trapped or rushed out of the home. For example, ample space should be maintained in each room so that the chi can continue to circulate and thus an open traffic flow is encouraged.

Another principle of Feng Shui includes Yin/Yang, which means a balance of opposing things. In life as well as design, nothing is all black (Yin) or white (Yang), but a balance can be created when using both. Yin is considered the female energy, and Yang the male. Yin/Yang is also applied to colors (Yin being muted; Yang, bright), lines (Yin, curved; Yang, straight) or objects (Yin, soft; Yang, hard). A balanced combination of Yin and Yang makes a nicely designed space, and will appeal to both sexes.

The five elements in Feng Shui that are also used to determine balance are water, wood, fire, earth and metal. These elemental representations refer to the actual materials themselves, as well as colors and shapes. Water is represented by the color blue and curvy shapes, wood by greens and columnar shapes, fire by red and spiky shapes, earth by browns and rectangular shapes, and metal by pastels and round shapes.

According to Feng Shui principles, if there is too much fire in a room, it may be over stimulating. Too much earth may be boring, too much water feels cold, too much wood may feel hard, and too much metal would be rigid. Yet all these elements can be combined to make a space that looks and feels beautifully balanced.

During this class it became apparent that, as a redesigner, I naturally use a lot of Feng Shui principles without realizing it. My goal is always to make a room feel balanced, and as a result my clients realize that it simply feels good to be in a space that is welcoming, comfortable and appealing to the senses.

One way to create balance is by using symmetry. This may include arranging furnishings of similar size across the room from each other, or taking the architectural features into

account and placing furniture accordingly. Another balancing act is using soft, curvy and comfortable (Yin) pieces along with hard, straight and sleek (Yang) pieces, or patterns and smaller accent pieces (Yin) along with stripes and larger items (Yang). It is usually advisable to use a variety of colors, shapes and textures in a room. In other words, mix it up!

The use of mirrors was another topic that was briefly discussed. Some of the advice given included: a mirror should not be hung directly across the doorway, as it will reflect the chi back outside; a mirror should not be located near the bed if you have sleep problems, as it stirs up the chi; and mirrors should be hung high enough so that the tallest person's head isn't cut off (bad chi!). Also, a mirror should not reflect anything uninteresting or unflattering, like a blank ceiling or a person eating, sleeping or talking. However, placing a mirror opposite a great view is a wonderful way to expand the room, as well as further appreciate the outside beauty.

Feng Shui practitioners use the art to enhance specific areas of their clients' lives, for better harmony, prosperity, health or relationships. The Chinese zodiac is sometimes used to determine the optimal furniture placement for each individual, and it is believed that changing the direction of a desk may lead to increased prosperity, or moving the bed might aid in better sleep, for example.

For those of us that are simply looking to create a more comfortable home, similarly, balance is the key. Ask yourself: are there items in each room that are hard and soft, curved and flat, warm and cool, reflective and dull? Take some time to insure that your home has a mix of shapes, sizes, colors and textures, and no overabundance of one over the other.

Whether influenced by Feng Shui or simply good design, having variety and balance in your home and your life can only contribute to a feeling of overall well-being.

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