Feng Shui for Architects

by Aphrodite Knoop

Professional Practice Writer and Editor

Feng Shui, which literally means wind and water, is the art and science of living in harmony with nature’s forces. This practice encourages the proper flow of energy and life forces for more humane and livable environments.

Feng Shui is no longer just an ancient Chinese secret. While slow to take root in the United States, it is now global and transcends culture and politics. So say Barbara Dellinger and Bobbie Galate, interior designers who explained Feng Shui to an audience of architects at a seminar in early December hosted by the architect firm of Davis, Carter, Scott in their Washington, D.C., offices.

“This is not a fad,” Dellinger said, citing the Trump Towers, MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Sydney Harbor Casino in Australia, and several Bank of America centers as representative of projects whose clients have employed Feng Shui during their design. Countries is the Pacific Rim, Australia, Finland, and the United Kingdom have embraced Feng Shui principles at varying levels, and many architecture firms abroad include Feng Shui consultants on their design teams. Anecdotal reports from the field now say U.S. corporations, health-care providers, services organizations, and residential clients are asking their architects about it. “We need to be smarter than our clients, who read about Feng Shui in the Washington Post,” said one health-care facilities architect.

History and tradition

Feng Shui developed well over 3,000 years ago among rural people of China who depended on its common-sense rules for their basic survival. They used the principles to develop their settlements, plant their crops, and even to site burial grounds. Studying natural elements such as river patterns, terrain, and the shapes of mountains, helped this ancient civilization understand the flow of the earth’s energy and how it could affect their daily lives.

Private residences, public buildings, towns, and the Forbidden City itself all were planned according to Feng Shui principles. Design elements were used not just for aesthetic reasons, but for more practical concerns such as controlling interior temperatures, air flow, and light, and protecting occupants and dwellings from flooding. Today, Feng Shui has evolved into different philosophical schools. For instance, the Compass System is the traditional feng shui, based on aligning the elements and the cardinal points to parts of a room, building, or town. The Black Hat system is a more recent development that uses a grid system and intent to achieve balance and harmony.

Basic principles

Dellinger explained that although it has roots in Tibetan Buddhism, Feng Shui is
Practice

Feng Shui for Architects

continued from previous page

neither a religion nor a superstition. It is
an art based on harmony, balance, tex-
ture, color, and style. It is equally a sci-
ence, based on astronomical and math-
ematical principles such as the golden
ratio and the golden rectangle and spi-
ral. Feng Shui also incorporates philo-
sophical principles from the I Ching.

Feng Shui first became popular in the
U.S. among homeowners, but has made
its way into large commercial projects,
including hospitals and other health-
care facilities. Dellinger, who works for
the District of Columbia's Washington
Hospital Center, said that in her experi-
ence, many Western health practitioners
are getting into Feng Shui because they
understand the environment—including
the flow of energy and buildings them-
selves—affects people's health. These
practitioners sometimes find that tradi-
tional Western medicine is often not
enough to help patients or their families.

Intention is one of the guiding prin-
ciples of Feng Shui, Dellinger explains. By
thinking it and designing it, we are creat-
ing part of the energy that makes things
happen. Other design principles ad-
dressed through Feng Shui include bal-
ance (the most important element); sym-
metry; ceiling heights; views; angles;
shapes; and circulation patterns, for
which meandering paths and curves are
preferred over direct routes and sharp
angles. In essence, Feng Shui is all about
what nurtures a building's occupants and
makes them feel comfortable in a space.
“As architects and designers, we instinc-
tively do a lot of these things. Feng Shui
provides the framework and the philo-
sophy to support our instincts,” Galate said.

Recommended reading

If you would like to learn more about Feng Shui, Dellinger and
Galate recommend the following sources:

• Clear your Clutter with Feng Shui,
by Karen Kingston, (Broadway
Books, 1999, recommended for
those who never read any books
on the subject.)

• The Western Guide to Feng Shui,
by Terah Kathryn Collins (Hay
House, 1999)

• Feng Shui Design, by Sarah
Rossbach and Master Lin Yun
(Penguin USA, 2000)

• The Practical Encyclopedia of
Feng Shui, by Gill Hale (Lawrence
Books, 1999)

• Feng Shui Chic, by Sharon
Stasney (Sterling Publications,
2000)

• Healing Design, by Hope Karan
Gerecht (Charles Tuttle, 1999,
advanced reading that explores
actual case studies and incorpo-
rates Compass School and Black
Hat)

• Essential Feng Shui, by Lillian Too
While the influence of feng shui can easily be witnessed in the Chinese landscape, it has made its way into western architecture as well. Many famous and prominent architects of this generation can be found trying to incorporate these ancient principles into their creations. In this article, we are going to discuss the basic principles of feng shui and how you can alter your dwelling according to it. Feng Shui Architecture 101. Contents. Feng Shui Architecture 101. The Mysterious Energy Called Chi. Basic Principles of Feng Shui. Leaning against Mountains and Facing Waters. Symmetry. Curves. Fe...