

Practice

Feng Shui for Architects

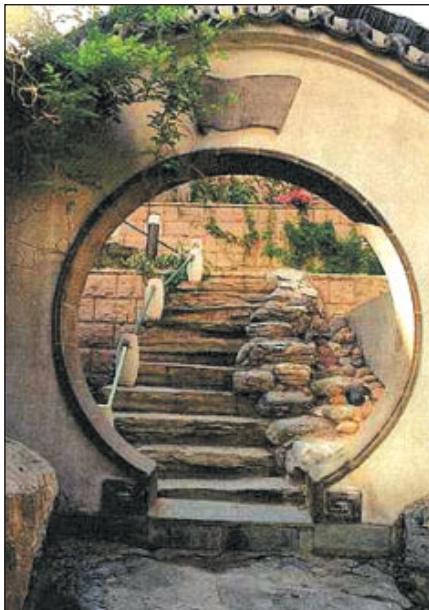
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Professional Practice Writer and Editor

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



Feng Shui calls for careful framing of views, both inside and out, as achieved by this moon gate.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARBARA DELLINGER, IIDA

A touch of red and a guardian creature bring good fortune and protection to this garden space.

clients have employed Feng Shui during their design. Countries in 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 an-

cient 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 *continued on next page*

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neither a religion nor a superstition. It is an art based on harmony, balance, texture, color, and style. It is equally a science, based on astronomical and mathematical principles such as the golden ratio and the golden rectangle and spiral. Feng Shui also incorporates philosophical 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 experience, many Western health practitioners are getting into Feng Shui because they understand the environment—including the flow of energy and buildings themselves—affects people's health. These practitioners sometimes find that traditional Western medicine is often not enough to help patients or their families.

Intention is one of the guiding principles of Feng Shui, Dellinger explains. By thinking it and designing it, we are creating part of the energy that makes things happen. Other design principles addressed through Feng Shui include balance (the most important element); symmetry; 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 instinctively do a lot of these things. Feng Shui provides the framework and the philosophy 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 Gerech (Charles Tuttle, 1999, advanced reading that explores actual case studies and incorporates Compass School and Black Hat)
- *Essential Feng Shui*, by Lillian Too (Element Books, 1996).