

## How Green is my Feng Shui?

### Design pros see connections between concepts

Sometimes it's difficult to refrain from New Age jargon.

Take the Arame Salon & Spa in Port Jefferson, where – ready? – the chi, or energy, flows and the carbon footprint is light. In other, more staid terms, a couple of years ago owners Phyllis and Ron Schlumpf were looking to make changes that were both friendly to the environment and their staff and customers. The spa was transformed and now boasts a seamless combination of feng shui principles and green building ideas.

"Green is about being earth-friendly, and feng shui is about what's human friendly – it's about how we feel both consciously and subconsciously," said Maureen Calamia, owner of the Saint James green/feng shui consulting firm Luminous Spaces, which guided Arame's renovation. An ancient Chinese art and science developed to allow humans to live in harmony with the earth, feng shui is complimentary to green design, Calamia said.

The eco-friendly features of the Arame renovation included sustainable bamboo wall coverings, cork flooring and non-toxic paint. These elements promote a healthy indoor air quality while the cork flooring is a feng shui connection since it's easy on the staff who are on their feet all day.

Previously, the receptionist's desk was front and center, right where customers walked in, and behind the desk loomed a cavernous room with salon chairs. "We moved the receptionist's desk to the side," Calamia said. "There is an uncomfortableness when a customer is confronted by a receptionist when he first walks in and can't scan the space and take it all in, and the receptionist was constantly assaulted by this flow coming at her."

A bamboo wall covering, with the company logo, was placed near the front, to separate the back of the salon. Customers may not look their best when their hair is wet or if they're sporting rollers and generally would rather not be on display, Calamia said.

Other feng shui elements include waterfalls, plants and candles, as well as curved surfaces that are intended to improve what Calamia described as energy flow.

### All about feelin' good all the time

"There's a growing connection between sustainable design and feng shui – both systems have a logic to them that is intertwined," said Richard Stott, president and founder of Steelbone Design in Southampton. Stott said he incorporates both feng shui and green principles into his residential and commercial work.



**MAUREEN CALAMIA:** Getting the word out about feng shui.

Green design is related to feng shui because it's not only about saving energy, but about creating a healthy environment where occupants of a building feel good, both physically and psychologically, said Tobias Holler, a professor of architecture at the New York Institute of Technology and LEED accredited professional whose Brooklyn architectural firm bears his name. Holler, who focuses heavily on sustainable design, has worked incorporated feng shui principles in his work.

The U.S. Green Building Council aims to be holistic in its LEED rating system, Holler said. For instance, he noted, properties can earn a point if the occupants have direct access to views of the outdoors, which is psychologically healthy in addition to allowing the space to incorporate more daylight to reduce energy usage.

### **Learning to crawl**

The green/feng shui connection is still "very much in its infancy," said Calamia, who, as a board member of the International Feng Shui Guild, founded and chairs the group's green living and design committee. She's in the process of reaching out to architectural and interior design associations to explore the creation of partnerships to foster the connection between the two fields.

The challenge lies in getting the word out about what feng shui is. "I think the term throws people off," Stott said. "They think it's a martial art or all sorts of other things."

Another issue is shallow, New Age reputation. Feng shui, as it is largely practiced in the western world – for interior decorating – is a superficial reading of the original concept, Holler said. "Feng shui is a very powerful holistic practice that involves harnessing the positive energy on a piece of land," he said.

While Holler said he doesn't know if feng shui in particular will grow in relation to green design, he sees green construction becoming more about creating higher quality, healthy spaces people will cherish and want to take care of for a long period of time. "The prevailing perception is that, to have a green space, you have to have less of something, such as you can't turn your air conditioner on as often," he said. "But people will come to realize that a high-quality, holistically designed space is smarter and more energy-efficient, and you don't have to give up anything."

### **Checking in**

The Viana Hotel & Spa, a newly built luxury property in Westbury, is on the green/feng shui bandwagon. "We wanted to design the hotel so that it would reduce our carbon footprint while eliciting an emotional response from our guests," said Alan Mindel, owner of the property, who brought in LEED accredited professionals and feng shui consultants to guide the building team.

The hotel, which is in the process of applying for LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, incorporates curves, textures, colors and other elements of feng shui to foster an emotional connection with guests.

"People don't say they're staying in a feng shui hotel, but they tell us how beautiful and comfortable the lobby is and how calming the spa is, so we have gotten the emotional response we were looking for," Mindell said.

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