

Feng Shui for a little Eastern influence

Remember when Jennifer Aniston's character took her mother's advice and decorated her apartment "the feng shui way" with Vince Vaughn in the film "Breaking Up"? Audiences around the world understood the reference. In fact, today almost everyone has heard of feng shui (pronounced "fung shway"), but very few know much about it – other than it's Chinese and has something to do with organizing your furniture.

Despite what you may think, feng shui is not a recent invention. In fact, the discipline is more than 3,000 years old. The term translates literally to "wind and water", and describes a method for creating harmony and balance through the placement of elements in a room or outside your home.

The idea of feng shui, then, is to allow the movement of energy, or "chi", in a way that creates a serene and positive environment. There are five elements that must be balanced in feng shui: water, wood, metal, earth and fire. Each element has its own unique personality that either creates harmony – or not – with the other elements. Water is associated with wealth, so feng shui enthusiasts will often include a fish aquarium or a trickling water fountain in their home or landscape. Wood promotes creative energy and motivation. Metal elements are powerful conductors of energy and should be placed where energy is wanted. Earth symbolizes stability and permanence. And fire – the most powerful element – is associated with energy and passion. Feng shui also considers the principles of yin (feminine) and yang (masculine), which also affect the elements. The colour red, for example, is associated with fire and is considered "yang". But a gently burning candle is a "yin" or feminine element.

If you want to make a start on feng shui in your home, here are a few quick fixes:

- 1. Feng shui your colours.** Soft earth-tone colours are very welcoming: soft yellow, terracotta, tans, taupes, and cocoas for example. They make excellent choices in a front hall or other common areas. In a room for sleeping or relaxing, soft pastels are best: pale blues or greens, for example. Vibrant colours like bright reds and oranges should be used sparingly as accent colours or in areas where their enlivening effect is wanted. You don't need to repaint a room right away; consider adding or subtracting colour using accessories, or by removing conflicting drapes or bedspreads, for example.
- 2. Feng shui your bedroom.** Keep colours soft and relaxing – on your walls and on your bed linens, which should be natural fibres. Your bed is very important in feng shui; it should be made of wood, as metal can disrupt sleep and create tension. It should have a clear view of the door, without directly facing the door, and it should not be placed next to a window. Ideally, it would have a sturdy headboard, be facing north or east, and be located in the opposite corner of the room from the door. Remove any large mirrors from the room or any which face the bed, and keep electronics to an absolute minimum. Computer desks in the bedroom are a no-no.
- 3. Feng shui your front entrance.** This area sets the tone for your home for your family and your guests; this is a major entry point for positive energy. Your front hall should be light and welcoming. There should be no clutter or obstacles in the front entrance that would impede the flow of positive energy into the house. Though many centre-hall plans include a staircase that faces the front door, this is not very feng shui – as positive energy can flow down the stairs and out the door. Here, you should place two symbolic obstacles – a set of urns for example – at the bottom of the stairs to prevent the loss of positive energy. And finally, a calming piece of artwork and some fresh flowers are both good feng shui choices in a front entry. Done well, a home does not look "feng shui", it simply feels welcoming and relaxing!

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