

Western Feng Shui and Architects Who Use It

To the Western mind and sensibility, the Eastern concept of feng shui warrants, at the very least, skepticism. Although most modern Western architects are not aware of it, they use feng shui principles instinctively throughout their designs. The design process changes, however, when the architect becomes more attuned to the mystical aspect of feng shui and how it can be applied to Western architecture.

“Feng shui” means wind and water. In the larger sense, feng shui is a way of integrating how people can live in harmony with their environment and nature. Feng shui begins by comprehending that people need nature and then it creates the most harmonious blend for the physical and mental health of the occupant of the space. This goal is a primarily important one for architects as well, so the two schools of thought are not that far apart.

Feng shui practitioners often use a complicated tool called a “bagua,” which is an overlay in the shape of an octagon. It is placed on over the site or floor plan of the building and it corresponds to the occupant’s life needs in such areas as career, health, relationships, and others. Practitioners of feng shui also often use “geomancy,” which is a form of divination, to read the currents of energy in the land where the building might rest. A bad reading from an expert in geomancy may cause the feng shui enthusiast to move his or her proposed building site.

A feng shui consultant from New York, Alex Stark, is also an architect. In his practice, he tries to blend the practical principles of architecture with the more transcendental aspects of feng shui. Stark believes that, while

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feng shui was introduced to America as an Eastern practice, it has evolved here and in Europe to something much more holistic. Most of Stark's clients are really interested in the philosophy behind some of the practices in feng shui, but they are interested in comfortable, low-stress living spaces. They are looking for the spiritual and physical areas of design that just aren't available through traditional Western design.

A lot of Stark's clients are eco-friendly and are looking for a way to incorporate their homes into the landscape with as little disturbance to the environment as possible, a very Eastern idea. These types of spiritually and environmentally driven ideals have just recently entered the Western collective unconscious. Feng shui, which has been around in the East for years, provided Westerners with the means to reach their goals for their homes.

Recognizing the beginnings of a consumer awareness about the sense of balance with nature and personal well-being, developers are often using feng shui consultants when planning communities. For example, the Tarragon Corporation recently hired Mr. Stark, a well-known feng shui consultant and author, to consult on a 15 story, 168 unit condo project in Edgewater, New Jersey. Hilary Thomas, a vice president of Tarragon Development Corporation believes that Stark's suggestions enhanced the original designs and many of his suggestions were implemented. Stark consulted on everything from room relationships within units to lobby layouts and landscaping. he even assessed the numerology of the project and suggested that the developer not use any number "4's" in his design. The condo had no 4th or 14th floor.

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