

# Power by Design

How an ancient Chinese art can energize your office... and your career

**R**on Pompei could see that something was terribly wrong. As cofounder and creative director of Pompei A.D., he pioneered the idea of designing retail environments as social and cultural destinations—places that engage people on both personal and creative levels. His own office, however, did anything but. “The old layout hindered communication, productivity was tanking, and employees were always interrupting me with minutiae,” says the 60-year-old designer and architect. “I was constantly distracted.”

Pompei’s situation might smack of a psychologist needing his own shrink, but his solution is one that is shared by an increasing number of top-level execs: feng shui, the 3,000-year-old Chinese art of arranging one’s space to be in harmony with the environment. “By manipulating your surroundings in certain ways—color choice, furniture arrangement, use of natural materials—feng shui can increase productivity, reduce employee burnout, and create a more amicable working environment,” says Alex Stark, one of the nation’s top feng shui consultants and the force behind Pompei’s redesign.

Nonbelievers may liken the ancient practice to new-age business voodoo, but many psychologists disagree. “It comes down to design psychology, and incorporating such principles into your office provides a daily reminder that you’re a force in the workplace,” says Susan Painter, PhD, a design psychologist at the Los Angeles architectural firm AC Martin Partners and principal at ForrestPainter Design, in Venice, California. “It also makes everyone feel more comfortable, making it easier to do good work.”

But does feng shui really make a difference? “You bet,” says Pompei. “I come into work now and I feel refreshed, energized, and even inspired, and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that our business is blossoming into new areas.” Here are the design tips that helped Pompei reignite his company. They’ll work for you too. **STEVE CALECHMAN**



**Go with the flow.** A small water display, such as a fountain or an aquarium, can promote calmness, says design psychologist Toby Israel, PhD, author of *Some Place Like Home: Using Design Psychology to Create Ideal Space*. Feng shui also associates flowing water with prosperity and wealth. “When we see vegetation and water, we know that we can survive. It triggers a feeling of well-being,” says Israel.

**Let there be light.** Lighting should be subtle but effective, so keep the fluorescent overhead variety turned off. “Brighten your office with desk lamps and floor lamps instead,” says Stark, adding that, together with plants, using lamps with full-spectrum incandescent bulbs is the easiest way to bring feng shui into an executive cubicle. “These lightbulbs simulate natural sunlight, which promotes energy and natural movement,” says Stark.

**Think green.** Plants represent growth and have a calming, restorative effect by bringing in oxygen and removing carbon dioxide, says Painter. A well-tended tree in the corner shows stature, strength, and conscientiousness.

**Face your audience.** During negotiations, have visitors sit across from you at your desk, with their backs to the door. If consensus building is needed, go to an area with comfortable chairs and a round table. Always put yourself in the power position, with your back protected by a solid wall and eyes toward the door. “You’ll feel secure and your visitors will be slightly uncomfortable, giving you the upper hand,” says Stark.

# CAREER

**Find your hue.** Pompei's walls are a neutral off-white, which allows the furniture, artwork, and rugs to provide colorful accents—red for power and energy, and green for growth and fortune. "These colors will work for anybody," says Stark, "but they're particularly good for financial types. Creative people should focus on blue. Legal types, meanwhile, will benefit from yellow, gold, or brown, all of which have a grounding effect that makes others feel comfortable in your ability."

**File away clutter.** Pompei's cabinets and credenzas are easily accessible, allowing him to store all but his most pressing projects out of sight. "Eliminating clutter will allow you to think more clearly and be a strategist," says Stark. An untidy workspace sends the opposite message. "A clean office also appears larger," says Painter, "and status is related to office size."

**Organize your desk.** Place pictures of your spouse or lover in the upper-right corner—the relationships area. Move your phone, business cards, and paperweights to the upper-left corner, which is the wealth section. Place your computer to the right-hand side of your desk, leaving the area in front of you open to work on projects. "Nothing new comes into your career unless you make room for it," says Carol Olmstead, author of *The Feng Shui Quick Guide: Everyday Tips to Improve Your Life*.

**Assume the power position.** Pompei's desk is at the far end of the room, facing the door. This angle welcomes new opportunities and speaks of authority and control. "Try to get a desk with a front panel to shield your legs; it provides privacy and sets a clear boundary between personal and public space," says Painter. Don't skimp on quality either. "High-end furniture reinforces the idea that your office makes money," says Israel.

**Clean your screen.** A cluttered computer screen has the same effect as an untidy desktop: It acts like a traffic jam for productivity and success. If it's peppered with files, organize them into folders, and set the background to a nurturing color. Any earth tone will do, but azure is especially beneficial for building self-confidence and heightening intuition. Also, use an inspirational image for your screensaver. A flowing river, for example, enhances fortune and spurs original thoughts.