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INTERVIEW: ALEX STARK ON GEOMANCY AND FENG SHUI IN CREATIVITY, EFFICIENCY, AND DESIGN

Lauren Gonzalez, MFA, MA

Ever wonder how that stunning aerial photograph of the Grand Canyon, with no one in it, hanging on your bedroom wall, is affecting your relationships? Or that armoire with closed doors sitting at the end of your bed? Are you puzzled by how your luck changed, for better or worse, after you rearranged your office? Or why just one of an arrangement of same-species plants in your garden refuses to grow? Why new clients haven't been calling? Or why they do (or don't) stick around? Co-founding Editor Lauren Gonzalez spoke at length with renowned European geomancy and feng shui practitioner Alex Stark, recognized worldwide for helping people, organizations, and institutions tap into their best potential by better understanding and collaborating with their environments. Stark's client list is formidable: Whole Foods, *The Today Show*, Condé Nast, Prudential Real Estate, Morgan Stanley, Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, Equinox Gyms, the Hyatt Corporation, and many others. The following interview explores not only how we respond to our environments, but how our environments respond to us, shaping every aspect of our lives. Stark speaks about design and architecture in terms of the conscious practical, emphasizing the importance of communing with nature; of utilizing *flow*, not force; and tending to creativity, not commercialism.

Lauren Gonzalez: You consult on issues of creativity, efficiency and design, and it seems as if a greater number of people are more interested in these things today. How do you think we got to the point where people are more attentive to design in their lives?

Alex Stark: I think a couple of key developments contributed to that. One has been the proliferation of high design in technology. Companies like Apple, for example, have really broken previous barriers in terms of providing not just efficient devices but also devices that appeal

to the aesthetic and the creative facilities of the user. That's kind of ridden a whole wave. Of course everybody's been copying Apple but the fundamental issue is that people have come to expect a certain level of design and creativity in their ordinary everyday objects. That existed before but was considered to be high-end design. Today it's everywhere, in your Android, in your laptop, in your tablet.

The other thing is that this kind of got mixed with a growing interest in sustainable practices, both in terms of design as well as production, so that particularly at the architectural level, the level of buildings, décor, interior design, furniture design, accessories and so on, there's a much greater awareness in the public that there are various ways in which you can source and produce things, these materials, these objects, these amenities and that you don't have to ignore the source provider. Also issues of child labor, issues of sustainable materials of course are much more in the mainstream now than they ever were before.

A lot of this is pioneered by the architectural profession. Twenty, thirty years ago they were talking already about sustainability in materials but it's come to mean something completely different in our time, and includes the communities that source the materials as well as their livelihood. The whole fair trade movement has actually been infolded into the design movement. This recent fire in Bangladesh...

Lauren Gonzalez: In the garment factory.

Alex Stark: Yeah, it simplifies how that works. Fifteen years ago nobody would have cared. Now we're horrified that the people who make our clothing could possibly be working under those conditions. In addition to that, specifically to the world of geomancy and more esoteric practices, there's also been a growing awareness and a growing acceptance –it came through

the eastern modalities, acupuncture, energy healing, Qi kung, and so on, and the media has done a fairly good job of connecting the two. Most people understand it. I get calls today that I would have never expected ten or even five years ago. We're working on a project with a research institute in D.C. whose primary client is the U.S. Army. That gives you a sense of where this is going.

Lauren Gonzalez:

You work with companies from Beth-Israel Hospital to Morgan Stanley, the Today Show, Open Center, Equinox Gyms, residencies and hotels all over the world and sacred sights as well—such a mix. How do you even pitch your work to companies most of us wouldn't associate with holistic practice, for example, and how do you describe geomancy or feng shui in a way that matters to them?

Alex Stark:

Well first of all we don't pitch. I gave up on advertising and pitching a long time ago because the nature of the practice isn't commercial. It's really about providing a certain value to the client or user that is about optimizing their opportunity, their potential, their worth. So even though we charge for our services, what feng shui consultants, geomancers, actually are doing is they are trying to improve the entire web of nature including humans and what humans do. So advertising is a kind of a contradiction in that realm. A lot of my colleagues try to advertise and typically it doesn't work all that well.

The best way to work in this field is to network, to find likeminded people and then collaborate on projects that bring a greater awareness to whatever field we're in. For example, when I work with hospitals, what we're trying to do is to push the envelope in terms of the delivery of alternative or complimentary healthcare. It's not really a business as much as a collaboration with a common goal. With builders it's about bringing a more sustainable lifestyle to their clients, tenants or