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'Gold Coast' Developers Warm to Feng Shui

By JILL P. CAPUZZO
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THE crystals have been buried, and the mirrors are so completely embedded in the building surface that they are barely visible. Yet they and other features often associated with the practice of feng shui are being incorporated into the design of several buildings going up along [New Jersey's Hudson waterfront](#).

Respect has grown apace with the understanding of feng shui, a traditional Chinese discipline of aligning buildings and interiors in a way that will produce harmony and success for their inhabitants. It is even starting to find a critical mass of converts among developers, architects and designers in places like New Jersey's "gold coast." Beyond being a valuable marketing tool in an area with a sizable Asian-American population, professionals in these fields say, it is proving

especially useful when linked to smart design and eco-friendly living.

"Even if you're not familiar with the history of feng shui, or don't care about the energy and spirituality of feng shui, we've learned that it's a very thoughtful approach to great design," said Lisa DeLove, the interior design director for the [Roseland Property Company](#). "There's a subconscious rhyme and reason of why a space works, whether you feel good in this space or not."

Roseland, the developer of the Port Imperial project spanning three towns on the Hudson waterfront, as well as 99 Hudson, a 1,000-apartment complex in Jersey City being built in partnership with Hartz Mountain Industries, has become a convert.

The New York Times

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Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

FLOW OF RICHES?

RiversEdge at Port Imperial in Weehawken faces the water, which feng shui deems auspicious for making money.

When feng shui principles began to be applied on the \$2 billion Port Imperial project five years ago, Roseland hired [Alex Stark](#), a feng shui expert. Rather than waiting until the end of the construction process to add a few token touches to the completed apartments, the developers had Mr. Stark at the table from the beginning, seeking his input on orienting the buildings in relation to the adjacent river and highways, designing the lobbies and corridors, and situating the amenities. Ms. DeLove acknowledged that convincing the executives at Roseland of feng shui's value had been “a learning process.” But she added, “By the end we were enlightened.”

“Roseland was skeptical at first,” recalled Mr. Stark, a native of Peru and graduate of the Yale School of Architecture who in the last 20 years has focused on feng shui exclusively. “They did it just to market to the large Korean and Chinese community in Weehawken. Then they started to notice a pickup in sales patterns. Not only Asians but everyone else was buying.” The 236 rental apartments in RiversEdge, the one completed Port Imperial building incorporating feng shui, are 98 percent occupied, according to Dan Burns, a Roseland spokesman.

Some aspects of the Port Imperial site were already “feng shui positive,” like plans to face all the buildings toward the water — a placement considered most auspicious for those seeking to make money. Other factors posed a problem, like the fact that the complex would back up to the Palisades, which Mr. Stark said was “not so great for family.” Still, in feng shui there are ways to counterbalance the negatives. Mr. Stark recommended that builders bury crystals under the buildings' foundations and add fish-eye mirrors to their exteriors to neutralize the bad energy from the steep mountain.

Lately Mr. Stark, who also serves as the feng shui consultant for Whole Foods Market stores, is advising Roseland on plans for 99 Hudson, a site that his preliminary analysis revealed was “decent for money, but very good for career.” He also performs land blessings for groundbreakings, and consecrations when a building is completed, recommending the most auspicious dates to hold these ceremonies, based on the astrological calendar that guides feng shui. While acknowledging that such rituals may once have belonged to “the 30 percent of feng shui that I thought was really wacky and out there,” Mr. Stark said he had come to respect all aspects of the discipline.

Roseland is not the only developer on the feng shui bandwagon. Last

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month, when the [Ironstate Development Company](#) and the [Kushner Real Estate Group](#) broke ground on 18 Park, an 11-story rental building in Jersey City, they hired [Feng Shui Manhattan](#) to help plan the setting for its 422 rental apartments and the Boys and Girls Club of Hudson County's new headquarters.

As Joshua Wuestneck, Ironstate's senior vice president for development, put it, "We saw not only how the feng shui principles resounded with the Asian population, but also a subtle linkage to green building concepts that our overall marketplace is interested in." To that end, the feng shui consultants have suggested using natural finishes in the lobby; they have selected a chandelier that Mr. Wuestneck said "distributes positive energy," and even helped pick the building's address. (As it occupies a full block, the developers had a wide range of numbers to choose from; they settled on 18 because it is lucky in feng shui numerology, Mr. Wuestneck said.)

When dealing with clients less open to such concepts, some designers and architects employ the concepts without the feng shui label. Bogna Pro, a partner in Sky Architects in Riverton, says she treads lightly when suggesting feng shui-driven solutions to troubles she might recognize in someone's home — and thereby someone's life.

"It's a very intimate way of thinking," said Ms. Pro, a native of Poland who has spent years teaching herself the concepts of feng shui, "and people tend to be very much on guard. Everyone wants to put on the best face, but if there's a problem, feng shui is going to find it."

Like other feng shui practitioners, Ms. Pro acknowledges that its tenets parallel some of the design principles she learned in architecture school. Those similarities allow her to incorporate the ideas using what she calls "more Westernized language." One example she cited was a project for a client in Palmyra who was adding a bedroom over the garage in his house. He said he wanted something that flowed well from the rest of the house, so her firm designed an entryway with a curved wall — which he loved. In feng shui terminology, she said, she would have described the design as "softening the corner so that the energy could flow smoothly into the room." But feng shui never came up.

People come into a place and "feel something is imbalanced but they can't pinpoint it," she said. "They talk about the flow of the place being off. We're not saying the flow of energy, but that's what it is."