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A Healthy Home Written by HCHH Staff

Woody Creek residents turn to feng shui master Alex Stark and sustainable building practices for optimal human and environmental wellness

When homeowners and building professionals set out to create a "green" home, they help protect the environment by paying attention to renewable and recyclable resources, minimal site disturbance and energy efficiency. But, what about protecting human wellbeing? Sure, it's becoming increasingly common to use low- or no-VOC products and install indoor air quality systems. But David and Kathy Perry took their task of building a healthy home — both for the environment and themselves — to another dimension by incorporating Feng Shui.

A good feel

The Perrys spent two years planning how best to replace their old dwelling, next to

a river in Aspen's rural neighborhood of Woody Creek, with a healthy and environmentally sustainable new house.

Architect Sarah Broughton oriented the Perry's house to maximize views of the surrounding mountains and river and make the structure energy efficient. Luckily, their New York feng shui expert, Alex Stark, agreed with the siting. However, his thorough study found that the Perrys' personal energies were not compatible with the way the house sat.

Feng Shui is an ancient Asian art of positioning objects, including buildings, to support the flow of energy and thus maintain or enhance wellbeing, wealth, relationships and more.

As a registered health practitioner, Kathy Perry trusts feng shui. She spent years ex-

amining why some homes feel better than others and found that whenever homes felt good, "almost invariably they have feng shui considered," David Perry says. For example, in the Vancouver area, where they have lived, a strong Asian influence supports the widespread use of feng shui. Homes that don't employ the principles "cut a high percentage of interested clients," he says.

"You can walk into a space and feel calming peace or walk into a space and feel jangled and unsettled," he says. "It's a whole field; some people think it's nonsense, and we happen to think it's not nonsense."

Stark made a number of recommendations to compensate for imbalances. To counteract the incompatibility between the house's orientation and the owners' per-



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sonal energies, Stark suggested adding a water fountain near the front door. To remedy what Stark called "a lackluster front door," the Perrys expanded the front courtyard. They built separate entrances into shared office space, because Stark asserts, "This will create a more equitable balance of power in the marriage." They also moved planned windows and sections of the house for greater harmony and prosperity. For example, they wanted a window opposite the front door to draw attention to the river in the backyard, but Stark said such an orientation causes the energy of the house to go straight in and out. So, they offset the window by several feet.

Overall, Stark found the area: "An extremely powerful location, blessed with a confluence of major topographical formations," adding that though Aspen receives the lion's share of this power, the home site is also strongly endowed. As such, it holds "vast potential for good fortune, prosperity, health, longevity and success for (the Perrys') descendants."

However, a large gravel pit nearby acts as a "strong scar on the earth," from which Stark suggested they protect themselves.

"We did things that other people think are completely wacky," David Perry says.

The most interesting remedy comes in the form of crystals. To compensate for "the potentially negative impact of the line of geopathic stress," Stark says it was important to install 30 mm and 40 mm mineral quartz crystals, measuring 3-4 inches long and 1 inch in diameter, into the foundation's corners. He also used quartz in the powder and mud rooms to compensate for incompatibility between the two rooms and, thus, the career and personal life-path sector.

Sustainable, in and out

In addition to building a healthy and environmentally sustainable home, the Perrys wanted a contemporary look that would blend into Woody Creek's character, which is "rural and a little bit funky," David Perry says.

They built "as green as we could afford," he says. "We were working in what's considered a tight budget in the Roaring Fork Valley."

To reduce site disturbance, they began by locating the new structure on nearly the same footprint of the old. They especially wanted to preserve mature cottonwood trees, which now act as one border of their outdoor courtyard. They also recycled construction debris, including cardboard, wood and metal scraps.

In addition to low VOC paints, the Perrys wanted insulation and flooring that would not release volatile organic chemicals into their living space (in terms of plywood and glues). They chose blown-in wall insulation made from recycled newsprint and prefabricated structural insulated panels (SIP), which allow for nontoxic, hard insulating in between wood sheathing. SIPs are known for their high insulation value and their ability to reduce the amount of wood used for framing. But SIPs require extensive planning — to the point that builders know exactly where each electrical outlet lays, so the Perrys "spent money upfront to plan well," Broughton says, explaining that

not planning, or "having people on the construction site not knowing what they're doing, is expensive."

In laying out electrical patterns, the Perrys avoided placing wiring and outlets in areas they slept in or otherwise spent a lot of time.

"We didn't want electromagnetic energy in our home," David Perry says. "It's a very serious thing ... we believe there's really strong negative health effects (and Kathy has studied these). The human body is a large antenna. You can pick up and magnify electromagnetic energies."

In terms of flooring options, the Perrys turned to adobe floors to avoid carpet, which collects dust; concrete, which is an unyielding surface that can be difficult to stand and walk on every day; and hardwood floors, which can use too many natural resources due to harvesting and transportation. Carpets and hardwood floors also traditionally contain glues that off-gas.

Perry calls the adobe floor — made completely of sand, natural clay and wax — "a labor of love." The 3-inch thick adobe, placed over gravel, took an entire month as craftsmen hand-troweled each layer, and then added pieces of straw and mica for visual interest.

"At first glance, it looks like an interesting concrete floor," David Perry says.

They opted for a more textured look, with a natural linseed oil finish, rather than a highly polished one. Though adobe is more expensive than concrete, the Perrys appreciate the bounce of it, which makes it "very comfortable to walk on and live in." It also acts as a dark mass to attract and hold heat in the winter.

The Perrys did carpet bedrooms upstairs with a wool blend — a renewable resource that ensures healthy indoor air quality.

All cabinets (fabricated without formaldehyde adhesives), trim and bamboo stair treads employ a low-VOC, water-based clear stain.

"I think it's totally the future," Broughton says. "I don't think people realize how sick they get (from off-gassing), so I'm happy we're learning more about it."

The 4,336-square foot (including garage) home, organized around two intersecting rectangular structures, features extensive windows for efficient lighting and passive solar properties. In fact, when the Perrys switch the lights on at night, the home looks like a glowing lantern above the river.

In addition to passive solar, the structure includes a planned solar array and solar hot water heating, which will provide 60 percent of the home's energy and 100 percent of the family's hot water needs.

The roof is also remarkable: A super-insulated, non-vented system (as opposed to vented attic construction) adds to energy efficiency, while the metal roof material contains 30 percent recycled content, and is recyclable itself.

In addition to sustainability, the modern home integrates such emerging trends as: saving space by not incorporating guest rooms, installing large sliding and pivoting interior doors, and positioning the two intersecting boxes that comprise the home to create an outdoor living space on the second floor, which overlooks the river.

Each detail adds up to a comfortable, healthy home, both for the inhabitants and the environment.



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