



## 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

buyers so that the tenant, the buyer can have a more relaxed, more embracing environment for the families, their work or whatever it is that they're providing.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* It sounds like it really just takes one person within an organization to have a certain consciousness for making an environment or a relationship better, who then finds his or her way to you, like someone at the Army did.

*Alex Stark:* Yes, exactly.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Can you say more about the Army project?

*Alex Stark:* That project is a little bit confidential, so I don't want to talk too much, but the [D.C.] research organization specializes in providing metrics for complimentary healthcare in the medical setting. They look at hospitals across the country and overseas that are providing services like acupuncture, homeopathy, energy medicine and many of the modalities within the hospitals and the medical setting. They're very well funded. They have an office in D.C., and because of connections on Capitol Hill and in that world they've been able to access the most important research institutes in the country. The Army got interested because they have, as you know, this huge number of disabled veterans that are beyond the medical paradigm. There's nothing much we can do for them. Our technology has exhausted itself.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* And that *technology* can even be traditional Western medication.

*Alex Stark:* Correct. There's a whole medical component that's applied, very intensively of course, to rehab soldiers, but there's also psychological counseling, peer counseling and even an effort in energy medicine. Depending on the population, they're using Native American-type ritual medicine and so on. They're testing and trying

different ways of doing things, and hopefully trying to find ways to do statistical analysis so as to see, “How does this work. How can we help people, pretty large populations actually, that are in need of this type of service?”

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

In the how-to section of your web site, you offer advice on space clearing, despacho ceremonies, ritual, cairn construction, daily meditation practice, and so in a setting such as the Army research institute, obviously it’s important that you not come in, do the work and then leave so that they can go back to old patterns. You’re trying to integrate sort of a daily practice in a workspace. How do you get these organizations to maintain the work you’ve done?

*Alex Stark:*

That’s a great question, Lauren, because I didn’t know how to do this years ago. It was a question I kept asking myself. I trained in the classical model, which is to work for an individual, a client, a family, and help them go through transformation in their lives through adjustments in their environment. But clearly the crux is their *life*, not the environment. The environment serves as an analytical tool and the way to change the energy but it’s really their *lives* that we’re talking about, whether they achieve a career goal, a love goal, a health goal, and so on.

Part of the recommendation or suggestion that we give in feng shui is lifestyle advice. “How’s your weight? Are you exercising enough? What’s your diet like?” We look at astrological factors that may impact health and suggest adjustments. That’s fairly straightforward when it comes to an individual. When you’re looking at organizations it’s a whole other matter. And it’s very interesting to me how it plays out. Because I have a background in architecture, it is very easy for me to talk to architects, to translate the Eastern energy language into practical construction language because a lot of these architects are very bright and they’re used

to adopting restrictions as part of how they work. They embrace it almost immediately.

Once we saw that there was a certain advantage to the client or to the end user that [these architects] couldn't provide through their training and skill sets they'd start learning from me...today a lot of what I used to do is actually being done by the architect on the project. I don't have to train them anymore so I can spend my time doing more refined kinds of techniques. But a lot of the changes that need to happen have already been done by the architect. That was a real breakthrough. I was very lucky to work with a number of architects who were very interested in how this works.

In contemporary architectural training none of this is actually covered. They talk about kind of hard-nosed practical stuff, structures, construction, the code, all these restrictions for how a building has to be. Composition and design are almost second-tier and the whole psycho-spiritual aspect of life for the user is almost never even discussed. For the vast majority of architects this is an opportunity to recover a ground that they really wanted to cover when they started studying architecture. That's why they got into it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

It sounds like in architecture, much like in the medical profession where one could say a philosophy of healing drives people to become doctors, once you start in a program you learn the technical skills, and the more integrated healing piece is sort of pushed to the side, the same as it often is with psychologists and therapists?

*Alex Stark:*

Yes.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

What is your philosophy on the impact that our environments, whatever they may be, have on our psyches and relationships?

*Alex Stark:*

Well, we *are* our environment. From the perspective of all geomancy traditions whether they be Asian or European, Native American, African, all of these cultures and all of these systems agree that the environment is inseparable from us because we're *in* it so we're *part* of it and we *are* the environment. It's inseparable also from our consciousness. Two things are happening here: one is that you cannot speak of an environment *over there* because there's no such thing. Environment is always *here* and it's always *now*.

And you cannot actually speak of an environment that is discreet from your thinking or your consciousness. A lot of geomantic traditions have developed techniques and practices that look at the environment first as a reflection of the individual or collective as well as a cause and effect *source* for things that are happening to that individual or collective, a two-way relationship that's holistic and holographic so that every single moment that you're alive or that you're working or living in time and space you are impacting that environment *and* vice versa. The environment is like a feedback loop. You influence the environment by adjusting it, pruning it, building it, growing crops on it, destroying it, whatever you do and in return the environment feeds back to you and starts to affect things like culture, fortune, prosperity, health or the lack of that.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

In this case it's easy to see how technology is a sort of bridge, in a way, to greater awareness of our environment because technology is a *thing* we have in our hands, a *thing* sort of right in front of us that has maybe attuned us more to thinking about how we're affecting our environments...

*Alex Stark:*

Yes, except that animals don't have technologies like ours and they're still impacted in the same way.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

But animals have never been disconnected from

environment in the way that we are.

*Alex Stark:*

Correct. Yeah, that's one corollary. Another corollary that comes from this thinking is that the environment around you is interactive *with* you. Not only can you impact it, it can impact you back. Another corollary that comes from this thinking in most cultures is that the environment around you is actually intelligent and alive *beyond* being alive as a plant or as an animal. The entire thing is alive. There's a mind behind it, the whole concept of Gaia is a bedrock concept within all geomantic traditions.

In addition to that there's another concept that is rooted in the idea that if you are the environment and the environment is you, then everything around you has to reflect who you are and then you have to reflect everything that's around you. That's where the holographic component comes in. I think this is captured in new age speak a lot, like if one person is sick the whole tribe is sick, that type of thing. But it has a *really* serious practical application because from that perspective you can correct the dysfunction of your liver by changing something within your environment because it turns out to be the same thing. So the question is, "Where in your environment do you change it?"

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

And how do you access that? How do you access the relationship to the liver?

*Alex Stark:*

Right. Or your money. You're not making enough money. How can you adjust your environment and at what level of the environment? Is it your bed? Is it your bedroom? Is it your speed? Is it your neighborhood? Is it your country? How do you adjust it so that prosperity can continue to manifest. The practice of geomancy is simply identifying the techniques, the practices and the maneuvers to make that happen.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

And that's what you do for your clients.



*Alex Stark:*

Correct. Sometimes from a logical perspective the technique is absurd. It's like, "This couldn't possibly work," yet there's an effect that's induced by that particular technique. Just to give an example, *mirrors*. Mirrors are basically technological oddities, right, because we see ourselves reflected in the mirror and it makes us think that we're *in* the mirror when in fact we're not. It's an optical illusion that has a kind of psychological impact. Yet a mirror can increase the prosperity of a whole group in ways that has nothing to do with what you're reflecting, who's being reflected and so on. There's something about the mirror.

There's something about certain types of sounds that can induce greater harmony between people, greater levels of organization, greater complexity and management just through a sound. So when you try to parse it out and figure out, "Well why is this?" there's no real logical way to explain it. In Chinese feng shui there's a theoretical language but it has no bearing whatsoever to the logic or the scientific paradigm. It's called a correlative system because you correlate one *thing*. It's almost metaphorical except a metaphor is a mental construct. It's a psychological psycho-verbal construct but in correlated thinking you're actually using an object for its *particular* qualities as opposed to its metaphorical qualities.

The practice of geomancy is almost like being inside a parallel reality or an altered reality because the principles are different yet the application, the practical use, is directly related to ordinary life.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

And so in some ways you, in your work, are a translator between worlds.

*Alex Stark:*

Correct. So from the outside commentators say, "Oh you're looking into the invisible realms of energy, blah, blah, blah," but from the practitioner's point of view it's just another language. But we're looking at

the same world. We're just using different language, different tools, different observational techniques.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Through language we create a lesser or greater degree of access to more things.

*Alex Stark:* Correct. Yes. That's true within feng shui itself as well, by the way. Because the moment you apply language to anything you restrict it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* By applying language you narrow the view of how you can communicate with a thing?

*Alex Stark:* Exactly. In order to get around that most of the world geomantic traditions have devised techniques for training the practitioner and for doing the practice that sidesteps language. That kind of gets you into another realm where there's less language so you can do the work from that position. We have to expand because we're using language to explain non-language.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* [Laughs] Right. Which is so often the case in the psychotherapy room as well. It starts with a felt sense and then when either the therapist or the patient tries to apply words, the feeling might disappear, as deconstruction can change the nature of the feeling entirely.

*Alex Stark:* Right. A great advantage of working outside of language or parallel to language is that it's a much better or much more efficient way of accessing the reality and the consciousness of the material world, of bricks and mortar, of sidewalks, of highways.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* We have two obvious spaces—consciousness or psyche—and then the material, brick-and-mortar world. But in the world we live in today there's *another* space. We're taking up residence in *virtual* spaces, pseudo brick-and-mortar environments online, on the Web. Relationships, work, spirituality, education—all

these things exist in virtual space now. How then do you work between *those* worlds, and would we benefit from considering how our virtual spaces, too, affect us as we in turn affect them?

*Alex Stark:*

From a geomantic perspective, the virtual world is only a *word*. There's no such thing as a virtual world because it's all happening through the technology of your computer and the interconnectivity of electrical systems and so forth. It *appears* to be virtual because we're using a language to refer to it and it's not typical in the sense of your car and your pen, but it's *still* rooted in a Feng shui mechanical paradigm. That's important to understand because I think people get carried away thinking that the virtual world is somehow different. It really isn't.

Another thing that's important to understand is that the sense of mystical detachment that the so-called virtual world has—and this is why you get excited about it, somehow it exists on a kind of a higher plane or a different plane—is true of ordinary reality as well. A brick-and-mortar house is as vibrationally exciting and alive as the Web and there's as much communication coming from that pile of bricks and mortar as there is from all of the websites on the planet and all the servers put together. Because in all these cultures they've developed a concept of energy or vibration, of *prana*, of *chi* or whatever the word is, to refer to that aliveness in the physical world—sometimes of course it's called spirit—that makes it possible to interact with a certain level of spirit or vibration. Virtual reality is the same as ordinary reality. It's the same thing as your thought process, by the way. A good feng shui practitioner can walk into a space and through the use of thought alone change the outcome.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

And in that sense it's almost like the virtual world, so-called, is preparing us for a future where people may just take for granted, "Of course you use your thoughts

to change the so-called reality.” It’s almost like a training ground for that type of thinking.

*Alex Stark:*

I actually think it’s the opposite because by design in the current mode of virtual reality people are actually using their thought processes less.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

What are they using instead?

*Alex Stark:*

Well they’re substituting thought and creativity for the Web, for the *interface*. They’re confusing the *interface* for the energy.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Would you explain that?

*Alex Stark:*

I’ll tell you a story, because many years ago I was asked to feng shui a website, one of the very first real estate websites belonging to Corcoran Realty. There was a huge launch and this was before websites were common selling tools. Barbara Corcoran called me up and said, “Hey Alex, I want you to feng shui my website.” [Laughs] I said, “Barbara, that’s not possible. feng shui is not about websites. It’s about buildings.” Now, she’s a very smart woman, but she says, “But isn’t it about energy?” I said, “Yes...” “Well isn’t there energy in a website?” “Of course.” “Well then feng shui my website. See you on Tuesday.” [Laughs] Right?

So I show up, and she had called all the media; I didn’t even know that TV cameras were going to be there. So she puts me on the spot. She used to love to do this stuff. [Laughs] I’m standing there, the designer, the web people have worked up the website but nothing razzle-dazzle. Today it would be rudimentary interchanges and portals. I had to, first of all, analyze it and then *clear* it, like open up the pathways.

The analysis was simple enough but in order to open the pathways the only way you can do it in a *virtual*

environment is through meditation because there's nothing to manipulate. You can't burn incense. You can't say a prayer. Strictly meditational. I close my eyes and the cameras are rolling [Laughs]. I kind of *project* myself into the Net. What happened was it was like Alice and the Rabbit. It just sucked me right in except for there wasn't one rabbit hole. There was like a million, because that's what the Web is, like a million little rabbit holes.

I remember feeling like I was going to die right in there. I saw the mapping of the Web.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* It sounds like *the Matrix*.

*Alex Stark:* It looked like a million octopi, millions of octopi. Just stretching everywhere like different colors. It was a big shock to me; I came out of it. I had to compose myself because the cameras were rolling and I promised never to do it again because it was just way too weird. So anyway, about a month later I'm leafing through a *National Geographic* at my doctor's office and Bell Laboratories had just finished mapping the very first map of the Web and it was the exact same image that I had seen in my meditation. It was like literally the interconnections, the servers for the whole world and it looked just like what I had seen.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Somebody who created that illustration for Bell Labs had envisioned the Web as you had?

*Alex Stark:* No! They had just *mapped* it. They had literally, physically mapped it. It was just a map, a map of where the wires were, where the servers were, who was linked to whom. Just an ordinary map...

*Lauren Gonzalez:* But you *saw* that.

*Alex Stark:* I saw the same connections. I always teach that example because in the realm of geomancy what you're

accessing is *not* the physical connector or even the map of the connection. What you're accessing is the *connection* itself. You're actually seeing the connection between you and your house, between you and your bedroom, you and your desk. And second? What is our relationship? And that relationship has an impact on what happens to your life. You better play the game correctly so that you maximize opportunity and minimize vulnerability.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

When you went into the Corcoran real estate site, and you're seeing all of this, what did you actually do, or did you just gather information that would help them?

*Alex Stark:*

Well the deal was to open up channels so that customers would have easy access and go there and be attracted, and use those portals for sales, and it worked very well. It worked on all levels. She was very happy with the results.

But it was a very unorthodox way of doing it. If you do it the normal way you have to spend money on advertising. You have to do marketing and so on and so on. But Barbara Corcoran was smart so she knew that this was a much more cost-effective way of doing it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Companies can hire you or someone like you to help them with their marketing on a completely different level.

*Alex Stark:*

Exactly. Well for example, we do a lot of work for realty companies that have difficulty selling or renting spaces. Typically they won't call us until they have serious problems because they have their own techniques and they're good at this, right? I'm talking about major companies. They call us in and we analyze and kind of look and poke and figure out, "Okay, these are the two or three reasons why we think it's not happening and these are the two or three corrections we suggest." Sometimes it is a marketing correction like maybe the website's a little sloppy or the colors are not right or whatever but more often than not it's an energetic problem.

There's not enough dynamism or energy in the space or maybe the space contains energies that are too old or there's not enough openness in the energetic nature so that a new tenant can come in and feel like they can project their goals and aspirations into it and so on and so on. Then we do the procedures that are prescribed for those problems. And it works! It's the weirdest thing, it just works! We were called recently to help with the renting of large chunks of the old *New York Times* building, the one near Times Square. It wasn't renting. They had spent a lot of money. They had dolled it up and done whole floor mock-up grids with basketball courts and desks and boardrooms, the whole thing. I had never seen a better staging job ever. It was just gorgeous. And nobody was renting.

They asked us to focus on just one particular floor and one particular part of that floor. I went in and the technique I used in this case was to bury crystals into the walls and created a kind of perimeter around the one they wanted to rent. Sure enough, a couple weeks later somebody signs a lease. That was nice. I was very happy. But what happened next was really interesting because all of a sudden tenants showed up for the floors above and below but they only wanted to rent the same matrix that was included within those crystals.

They didn't want to rent anything but that. These were floors that hadn't been staged. They were ugly, dirty, dark. But the client wanted those spaces.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

People just felt it, felt where they wanted to be?

*Alex Stark:*

Well they could subconsciously or whatever the word is feel the vitality of the space and then they could project their needs into it and make a business decision about renting the space so that they can achieve their goals. It had to do strictly with energy because we didn't *do* anything. Nothing *changed*. There were no color changes, no décor changes. Nothing. Just strictly crystals.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Doesn't this say, too, that we tend to over value what we *see*. The dominance of sight. When I hear the words architecture, design, I immediately mentally defer to what I *see*. "Oh that's something I can look at, design is something for my eyes," and yet there's a moment when one puts an iPhone into the hands of someone who has very little access to much design and certainly high-end design, and that person says, "Wow. Oh that's really cool." Like with the *Times* building, he might not have the words for it, or he might not have access to it or experience with it but there's an inherent *knowing* that this is a satisfying or productive space to be in, like knowing you want the table by the two windows instead of by the wall; these sorts of things are happening on an unconscious level, right?

*Alex Stark:* Correct. These are simple examples but it gets very delicate, for example, when an environment is actually making somebody sick and you cannot relocate the client. What do you do then? Sometimes nature itself has a role in that; it's not just the house. There's a phenomenon called geopathic stress. I have a page on that on my website, in the resources section. [Editor's Note: <http://alexstark.com/guidelines/earth-energy>]

But the earth is a very complicated matrix with different levels of energy, and some wavelengths are great for humans, so we live in areas that have those wavelengths, and other areas are not so great for humans but they can be good for other life forms. A lot of vermin, for example, spiders, ants, wasps, bats like certain types of energies that are not good for humans. That's one of the reasons why humans have become averse to roaches and spiders and that type of life form because we know instinctively that spending time in those places is not good for us.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Rats on the subway tracks in New York City, in the tunnels, bats in the attic, spiders in the garage...



*Alex Stark:*

In Africa, for example, in tribal Africa and in many parts of the world termites and termite mounds—not the California termite but the big mounds that you see in Africa—that habitation is *never* used for human habitation because they know that that particular type of ant is attracted to a form of energy in the land that's not good for humans. Conversely, Native Americans have this belief that places where deer overnights, where they sleep, are great for humans. That's a great place to pitch your tent or build your house. Right?

One of the interesting things about modern developments is the conception that we don't pay attention to that, and particularly of late most of the good land's gone, right? So developers are searching for land and they're accepting or using land that is less desirable with packaging and marketing, and little do you know you buy your little condo and all of a sudden you're here in this place that nobody in their right mind in the old traditional mold would have ever accepted. They would have known not to go there. But today you don't know.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

We think if we remove the termites then the problem's solved.

*Alex Stark:*

Correct. That's just one level of the problem but there are even deeper levels. For example, burial grounds. A place where humans have been buried is a terrible place to build homes because the energy of the deceased is there. It's in the soil, literally. But old cemeteries get moved. The city gives a permit. The developer moves the cemetery and builds a development right over the cemetery. Then all of a sudden we start getting the phone calls. The store that can't sell anything, the shop that has a ghost or the family that everybody gets nightmares or they start to get sick. As you can imagine the diagnosis of something like that is a very complicated thing, not even talking about the fixing. Fixing a problem like that is a multi-layer, highly complicated affair because

you're dealing with, potentially with a burial ground, you're talking about hundreds of people. And maybe it was an old burial ground and their history, and so it gets complicated.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* What comes to mind is just how devastating the effects of war...

*Alex Stark:* Exactly.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* When an entire nation, the United States was a warzone driving out Native Americans, Iraq, Gaza...how can any generation build homes without addressing these issues on a deeper level? Rebuilding after war goes well beyond structures, right? You might sign a peace treaty and put up new buildings and fences, but you're not actually healing the land or communities.

*Alex Stark:* It's interesting. For example, in Kauai nobody builds without consulting the Kahunas because they know that you're risking. In Iceland there's a government official in the planning department, I believe, whose role it is to keep track of the faeries. That's their role. They know where they are. They know where not to touch. Of course feng shui consultants do that in China and in Singapore. In Japan, the Shinto priests do that or are called in to resolve problems. Even more interesting in Native American tribes many of them would not allow warriors to come back into the living compounds unless they went through a ritual purification so they could get rid of the heavy energy of warfare. But in our world we just accept it. Remember when the Amish had that horrible massacre in the school building in Pennsylvania?

*Lauren Gonzalez:* In 2006, yes.

*Alex Stark:* And do you remember what they did? They tore the building down and burned it to ashes and condemned the land in perpetuity. Nobody will ever use that piece

of land ever again for anything. Very smart because it was such an awful thing that anybody who's going to spend time on that land is going to risk a problem. Years ago I went to Argentina. I got called in by this family because they had had some really bad luck. They were very wealthy, it was a beautiful home, but their son had just killed two road workers in a car accident and had almost killed his best friend.

It was a combination of a bizarre series of problems that included electrical issues and garage doors that would open and close by themselves, watches that would change time on their own. It was like a classic poltergeist situation. So I went down. I spent I think four or five days sorting out the mess. Sure enough what turned out is that that land had been fallow since the 1800s and somebody had developed it recently and they built this beautiful house. But the reason the land had been left alone for like 80 years is because an orphanage had actually been burned the ground in a crime, it was an arson, and the orphans had all died.

This had to be in the 1800s, so it was over 100 years ago. Yet here's my client, totally innocent, but they wandered into this problem. It took a while to sort out and it took almost three days of corrections and rituals and feng shui work, and on the evening of the last day as I'm about to finish and say, "Okay, all this energy is cleared up now, and they can go back to living," they had this beautiful dog, and the dog dies right in front of them.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Oh. Just drops?

*Alex Stark:*

Just drops dead. Goes into agony and dies within a matter of minutes. Animals often will do this. Animals will sacrifice themselves, dogs in particular. Dogs have been known to do this for their masters, their friends, for humans. It was early in my career, it was a very good learning experience because it taught me a lot

about how land, ancestry and history connect. Ancestry lives in the land. People tend to think that it lives in our memories but the energy of your ancestors is in the land, in the soil literally. That's where it resides. That they are helter-skelter and digging holes and building buildings and blasting and excavating for highways is a touchy little problem because you risk alienating your ancestral background.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Is there truth in saying you can't go home again, that instinct in some of us to flee our home environments quite literally as if *saving* ourselves?

*Alex Stark:*

No. I think what you're referring to is a very common problem certainly in the United States typically in expatriated societies. Your ancestors came from somewhere else unless you're Native American and they had to go through the trauma of leaving their land, right? In the land that they left of course was the energy of their ancestry, their ancestors, their loved ones. But most people when—it's almost like the Holocaust. When people have to go through that kind of experience they have to disconnect from that energy. It's too painful to leave [the land] behind. Obviously in your training you've read about solastalgia and this whole issue of soul loss through abandonment of heritage and land, right?

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Glenn Albrecht. Solastalgia as opposed to nostalgia. Not homesickness from being separated from our land, but distress due to environmental changes to our land.

*Alex Stark:*

Yes. I think everybody in the United States is suffering from this, but what that does, not only does it make you more violent, more prone to aggressive behaviors, more prone to antisocial behaviors, it also makes you more forgetful. So you start to forget that you have this need for deep connection to the land and, through the land, to your ancestors.

- Lauren Gonzalez:* So we detach. We dissociate...
- Alex Stark:* Yeah, until you start believing that you can't go back. "What's the point?" It becomes *delusional*. At that point there's really very little that can be done to bring you back because you've lost the connection.
- Lauren Gonzalez:* Could that also have something to do with our—whether it's an unconscious reluctance to connect with land anywhere we move?
- Alex Stark:* Yes, of course.
- Lauren Gonzalez:* So it moves forward with us. In order to forget the past...
- Alex Stark:* Yeah, tropophobia, the idea that you cannot develop a connection with any particular piece of land. But that's a double-edged sword too because wherever you are you're sitting on someone else's land. No wonder you can't make a connection. It really is somebody else's. Look at the whole mess in Palestine. That problem will not be resolved until everybody kind of gets their head wrapped around the issue that it's an issue of ancestry that the Palestinians and the Israelis have in common—it's the same thing [laughs].
- Lauren Gonzalez:* Hmm, exactly.
- Alex Stark:* They're acting as if they were enemies but the fact is that they're suffering from the same illness.
- Lauren Gonzalez:* An interesting perspective on Israel and Palestine. "Where is home? Where's our land? Whose land belongs to whom? Where do the ancestors live?" And they're all right *here*.
- Alex Stark:* Yeah. From this perspective, the violence is perpetuated because of the disconnection. Do you know the work of Malidoma Somé?

*Lauren Gonzalez:* I do. *The Healing Wisdom of Africa, Of Water and the Spirit...*

*Alex Stark:* Yes. He's written very eloquently about the disconnection of ancestry and how it makes people violent. It feeds war basically. War almost always is generated by that coadunation from the land and from ancestry.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Interesting too that he's writing disconnected from his homeland, living here in the U.S., not West Africa, Burkina Faso.

*Alex Stark:* Correct.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* I get the sense, listening to you, that on one hand, architects go into a job knowing what they're going to build, knowing what they're going to construct and on the other hand, but you go into a job having no idea what will happen, what you'll do within a given space. Like writing a novel where you might not know at the onset the story of the people or the land, the relationships; every time you go into a job it just sounds like you're walking into a story, a mystery, someone's or a place's history, and that you don't know what to expect. Is that accurate or do you kind of have a plan when you go in to work with an individual or an organization?

*Alex Stark:* It's a good question Lauren because I always tell my clients that in any particular job I have three clients, not just one client. One is the obviously one that pays my bill, and I have to get to know that client. I need to understand, if it's an organization, why it exists, what is the mission statement, in what ways reality defers to this mission statement, what are the challenges? So I have to attend to the business as a business, first of all. I have to know its history.

The second client is the community that that business serves or is otherwise connected to including

neighborhood *stakeholders*. Interesting enough when I first started my practice 30 years ago this concept was almost unheard of in the business world. Today it's a central concept of sustainable paradigms. Whole Foods, for example, in their statement of values they say, "We work for the benefit of all stakeholders." Then of course the neighbors, suppliers, the vendors, the buyers, the farmers, everybody. Right? That's the second client.

My third client is nature. I cannot do anything without considering the needs of all three clients. Where if it's possible to research a given client in a couple of days it's an entirely different matter to understand what nature is about in the larger sense because it's a much bigger project, a much bigger knowledge base. A lot of what we do in feng shui training is getting to know what nature is.

Some critical things have to be studied. One is you have to establish a personal relationship with at least one mountain system, valley system, lake/water system like a water shed. You have to develop an affinity with a particularly logical phenomena whether it's wind, cloud, lightening and so on. You have to be fully conversant with that particular energy because what happens is a very interesting thing.

When I walk into a site—I just went to a site, here in Maryland. I'm not from Maryland. I don't come here that often, but I walked into a site and it's a little bit swampy, right? They've got fairly old growth, maybe 150-year-old oaks and some maples but I'm familiar enough with wetland energy and have spent enough time in meditation, in training, walking, being in, getting muddy in certain systems that are similar to this one, that the moment I step on this soil and because I'm open myself to the consciousness of that piece of land, the land can now see me. It *recognizes* me. Ordinary people don't do that. They just walk in and

they're shut down. They don't see it the way we see it. Nature doesn't see them either.

It's almost like two people in a bar that never connect. The opportunity is there but it's missed. A good practitioner develops this habit of being always in connection with the entire matrix, all of it. Not just a piece of it but the entire thing. Because we do astrology we also have to be in connection with the entire astrological grid. You can imagine the level of concentration and focus that this requires because you've got 20 minutes with a client on that particular site and yet you have to understand the *entire* thing as a hologram, the whole thing. Not just a piece, but the *entire* thing.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* That's the holistic view. *Everything*.

*Alex Stark:* Now that's interesting for a couple of reasons. One is that it gives you an idea of how complicated the training is—typically it takes ten years or more to train. But it also feeds back the other way because having done that type of practice for a long time it's possible to walk into a house for the very first time, not even have the client present, and understand everything about the client with the first look. Download all of it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* That's because you're *connected*.

*Alex Stark:* This is very common in the practice. We kind of joke about it. A colleague will say, "Oh yeah, I'm going to go see this person in Boston." Automatically just the fact that they said Boston the other practitioner says, "Oh yeah, it's a family of three, isn't it?" You just know because you're connecting to the—it's like the matrix. You connect to the matrix and you can download all this information. Of course a conscious practitioner has to check it all out and certify it and make sure that it's correct, but feng shui consultants are a little bit like magicians. We live in a very kind of open grid. It's very



difficult to lie to a feng shui consultant.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* [Laughs]

*Alex Stark:* Really. I mean it's very obvious. People tell us all kinds of things and part of our training is to be very polite sometimes to enable the lie just to keep it going, so that it gathers a little energy so that it can change. I'm sure it's a little like therapy, right?

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Yeah, absolutely.

*Alex Stark:* But you *know*.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* You *feel* it.

*Alex Stark:* If you don't know you ask the tree in the backyard, "Hey, is this lady really happy like she says she's happy or why is she sad? Why does she look sad to me?" The tree tells you or the land tells you.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* It's a feeling within the relational *field*. In the psychotherapy room it's a feeling that the therapist can get within herself or himself when someone says something and it resonates. It has a resonance (or not) in the body of the therapist. "That's not true. That doesn't feel like the vibration of truth," or something's happening in the relational field that might shift someone's energy just ever so slightly after a feeling, topic, or sensation is explored.

*Alex Stark:* Yes.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Ecotherapists are trying to do what you do with the third client, that client being nature. Ecotherapists are trying to connect nature and the individual through the process of psychotherapy in order to integrate, to not see them as such separate things. Which also brings up the definition of holistic psychology, which is a struggle for people. I think the myth is that it's sort

of just a spiritual type of psychology. Really that's not looking at the entire matrix. What I appreciate about what you're saying is that everything is considered and that also includes the more technical aspects, or that which purely spiritual practitioners might devalue or see as "old paradigm."

*Alex Stark:*

Right. But the critical thing is that the practitioner has to have an established relationship or relationships with the matrix. It doesn't happen overnight. You can't just do it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

There isn't a book to read and suddenly you have it.

*Alex Stark:*

Correct. Even more importantly from the perspective of nature itself of the client you have to be able to download information about sadness in the land or the happiness in the land or the reluctance in the land to support a particular goal. Or sometimes you have to coax the land or that environment to support a particular goal that may be questionable from a certain perspective. That's the other thing. "Okay, I've been hired by a business. They want to make money. How do we do this?" I'll give you an example. I was hired by a group of Mexican investors to develop – this was almost ten years ago, eight, ten years ago—to develop a resort development in the West Coast of Mexico. I almost didn't take it because I don't do that work but the client came well recommended and they were devotees of a particular Indian guru. Something told me to take the job.

When we first started it was a classical ordinary golf club marina development. They had all these famous planners, all of these hotel developers. I was getting more and more nervous because this was not what I had wanted to do but I had committed. Every time I went down there I would go to these various places, very beautiful land. It's pristine. There's Jaguar. There's Whale. There's Turtle. There's all kinds of

beautiful things. I would communicate with the land and the animals and the spirits of these things.

They kept telling me, “This is fine. Just keep doing what you’re doing. Bring us this. Bring us that.” I would take offerings. I would do rituals basically, feng shui rituals, native rituals and so on. Well then comes the crash, 2007, 2008, and out goes the project because in today’s environment nobody can sell anything in this place because nobody has the money to buy it. So here’s this Mexican construction. They’re holding huge amounts of money, cash. They have to invest it. They start looking around for other ideas, and long story short they come in touch with some planners, some interesting, creative people, they consult their guru in India and all of a sudden the project morphs from marina and golf club, golf course, to a sustainable agriculture, a farm growing mangoes and tequila and chocolate and organic vegetables and the fisheries and of course a village for the fishermen and a village for the farmers. All of a sudden everybody’s interested in this project and money keeps pouring in from the government from here, there, everywhere. This is a *beautiful* project.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* And a *totally* different project.

*Alex Stark:* Correct. And more interestingly it turns out the foreman on one of these pieces of land, just an ordinary Joe, turned out to be one of the heavy shamans of the area, and all of a sudden he’s now the energy manager so he can get this project done.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* It took time.

*Alex Stark:* Right? This is what I’m talking about. So a feng shui practitioner doesn’t know what the outcome needs to be. We don’t make assumptions of knowing. All we do is we go in. We talk to the three clients, figure out what’s the proper approach and how do you move the

energy so that the best possible outcome can manifest not knowing what the outcome's supposed to be. Never get attached to results, ever, ever because when something is achieved maybe there's another result that's even better. Why get attached? Or, if nothing happens, maybe that's the best thing.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* This leads to flexibility. Assuming the outcome, needing to be right, creates inflexibility. In psychotherapy, we are mistaken when we have a certain outcome in mind.

*Alex Stark:* Yep.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* The psyche has to unfold, present itself in relation to all else.

*Alex Stark:* It's the same principle.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Launching a career in geomancy isn't as clear cut as becoming an accountant or Western medical doctor, meaning, the steps one has to take are not as clearly defined. So, what do you recommend to those wanting to become geomancers, feng shui practitioners? What is the first step?

*Alex Stark:* It helps to feel a calling, but this in itself is never enough. It is also important to commit to a particular school or modality in order to master its set of principles and methods. This can take up to 10 years to achieve, and in contemporary practice, most consultants have mastered dozens of modalities. We are talking of decades of apprenticeship

However, the student can accelerate this process by developing an ability to sense vibrational/energetic levels of information in nature.

The problem with sensing energies or vibration, of course, is that they are *invisible*, so the practitioner has to develop indirect ways of doing this. This can

manifest in a number of ways, depending on personal traits. Individuals who are kinesthetic can actually perceive the vibrations in their own body, others *who might be more visual* may see things, others might *hear* information. And, of course, dowsing is a more impersonal technique for amplifying the body's reaction to unseen energies and making them more accessible.

But another way to enable this process is to develop an ability to perceive reality in terms of patterns. Patterns are so important in feng shui that architectural theorists have suggested that feng shui is a form of pattern language, akin to Christopher Alexander's research into this area, or Ritu Bhatt from the University of Minnesota.

A third helpful quality is an ability to think in correlative terms, rather than in linear or logical terms. By this I mean that any given situation is analyzed using metaphorical or symbolic tools that ascribe meaning according to the situation's similarity to other (often unrelated) phenomena. The idea that a water fountain could increase your wealth, to use a crass example, refers to a watershed's influence on the fertility of a valley system. Clearly, a water fountain does not have the physical capabilities of a large river, but it does correlate water and its movement to an increase in abundance.

Becoming a practitioner requires mastering these three types of consciousness. In addition, the practitioner has to develop her or his personal power. Since geomancy requires an ability to see into energetic phenomena, it is impossible to practice it if one's own energy fields are degraded. Hence, a lot of training time is spent on learning qi kung, yoga, meditation, etcetera, as a way of refining the practitioner's energy field.

And even this is often not enough. In most cases

it is also necessary that the practitioner seek greater power directly from nature, through ritual, fasting, or vision quests. The term ‘walking the dragon’ refers not only to the practitioner’s need to actually walk the landscape in order to understand it, but also to become conversant ‘in a visionary way’ with the larger forces of the cosmos, seeking to embody the full power of land, sky, or meteorological phenomena. Clearly, we are in shamanic territory here.

An alternate way of assuming this power is to have it transmitted to the practitioner by a mentor or family member. Hence the tendency in the Orient to keep these practices within the family.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* How did you get started?

*Alex Stark:* In my case the initial trigger was a ghost that showed up in our first home in Park Slope. We didn’t know what to do about it, and when a friend who taught Chinese Literature at CUNY mentioned feng shui we cautiously searched around for a consultant. He got rid of the ghost, but when he explained what he had done, he used architectural language, rather than spiritual mumbo jumbo. I was hooked!

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Speaking of *intrusions* on the home front, as therapists and psychologists, we have to work on maintaining a boundary between our energy and that of our clients. You’re taking on the heavy energy of projects, people, like the story of the haunted orphanage land. You’re in environments all the time that you’re interacting with, and that are therefore interacting with you. How do you keep them from affecting you? How do you manage those relationships when you’re on a particular project?

*Alex Stark:* The most important thing is, first of all, all of this is happening all the time to everybody. On one level there’s nothing to be afraid of and nothing to do

[laughs]. At the highest level of the practice, like gurus, when they're in that state nothing touches them. Strictly speaking, within this matrix of nothingness and so on, there's only purity and only love and only power. At the level of energy it's just *flow*. That's a very important concept to understand. It takes years to actually understand it, and to learn how to use it and manage it.

But having said that we're mortals so the mind gets in the way and securities get in the way and judgment gets in the way. It's at *that* level where stuff begins to stick to the auric field, stick to the practitioner and by extension can start to stick to the family or to your home. So it's really, really important to develop practices to keep that clean. For example, I always tell my students, "If you want to be a feng shui practitioner the *last* thing you want to do is lie." You have to pay your taxes. If you make a promise you are bound to fulfill it. It doesn't matter if you die you have to fulfill it because if you don't you are breaking the integrity of that matrix. Better not to make a promise than to fail on a promise. Integrity becomes the cleansing agent and that's in behavior, in speech and so on.

Now nobody's perfect so the third tier of protection that's necessary of course are the practices themselves. When we go and we clear a space or just work with a space that may be contaminated in these ways there are rituals. There are techniques that cleanse your system. Karma's great about that. The moment I arrive home my clothes get thrown into the wash. I take a shower immediately, plus I do meditation all the time.

In addition to which feng shui techniques themselves have built in safety measures and clearings, within the ritual itself there's also clearing. It's very sophisticated, very elegant how that system works. A lot of young practitioners kind of get brash about it and they've got to barge in. They get irked; I get irked, too, particularly

when it comes to denser forms of energy like you said crime, war, violence, death and so on. That's like the practice itself.

The second one, which is a harder one, is how to keep this awareness of the world as this picture that I'm painting you, whole while at the same time pretending when I'm with the rest of the society like it's just an ordinary world. For me that's much harder.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

It seems like if you are seeing the tendrils, the connections, the lies, how do you walk through life each day seeing all of this?

*Alex Stark:*

The only way to do it is through compassion, of course. It's the only way because you see the suffering *and* you see the potential. Every day, every client I see the big question is, "What's their suffering? What's their potential? What's their challenge? What's their ultimate power and how do we reduce the vulnerability and maximize opportunity and so gently guide them so they can make the discovery themselves?"

Often and interestingly enough sometimes it's necessarily to pull the client out of the environment when they're really stuck and you get them out of there. You get them to move. You manifest the move for them or you physically take the client and take them into the woods and do a ritual in the woods or whatever just to get them out of that matrix they're in when they're in a spiral particularly in a downward spiral. You have to yank them out. It becomes more shamanic, more shamanistic, but it's built into feng shui practice.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Do you find that people sometimes think they're asking you for one thing, one service, and what they need is entirely something else?

*Alex Stark:*

One-hundred percent of the time [laughs]. By definition and it's even true for me because you don't know what



the next thing is. It's impossible to know that. Most of us don't know where the river *flows*. We just know it *flows*. Excellence, mastery of life is just knowing how to stay in the river and admire the beauty that surrounds you as the river carries you through life. To me that's mastery. Enlightenment is when you know where that river's going because I certainly don't know where my river's going. Most people don't.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

You work in *flow*. You're not intellectualizing it. It's how you live. It's how you breathe. You're breathing your work. So in that sense it seems almost silly to say, "What's difficult about what you do" because it seems like I'm drawing a line, asking you to define with language the *flow*, or the blockage to flow. But, what is the most challenging part of your work for you?

*Alex Stark:*

That it's lonely.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Lonely?

*Alex Stark:*

Yeah, it's lonely, by tradition, almost, because when you go down the rabbit hole this way particularly when you go to the rabbit holes I've been to, there's not a lot of people I can talk to. I'm trying to communicate them to you but it's words. Even within the feng shui community, the geomantic community I only have a handful of people who actually have any idea what I'm talking about. A lot of people read about it but they don't actually have the experience. You know what I mean? Even though it's possible to talk about it and it's a lot of fun not too many people have been down that hole. That's one problem.

The second problem of course is in order to maintain professional integrity you can't share it with the client and the clients can't become a friend. It gets a little lonely because you love these people. I've been with some families, worked with their grandparents, the parents, the kids, but I can never be their friend.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Similar to psychotherapy. The intimacy that forms between therapist and patient. Many therapists report patients saying, “No one knows me as well as you do. It’s the most intimate connection I have and I can’t count you as a friend.”

*Alex Stark:* Right. It’s also really fundamental to have a rock solid family life. You have to have it. And that’s true about—it’s often stated in all cultures that the healer woman, the *curandera* has to have a strong family otherwise it’s very dangerous because you can get lost. It can be a path of no return.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* I imagine that finding that solidity can have many divergent paths as well. When you’re seeking you rarely find, right? It’s the flow of the river, again.

*Alex Stark:* Right. But you know, after awhile you stop seeking. You just *flow*. That’s good because at that point there’s no struggle anymore. You kind of just keep doing it. That takes years and years. I mean even within the practice it takes years to reach that level. That’s another reason why I don’t advertise. I don’t proselytize. I’ve even stopped lecturing.

I’d like to get back to it, but there’s no—I don’t feel the need to *seek* anymore. It’s just exploring. My job right now is just to do the best possible job and really help everybody I can. At some point I’ll go back and teach so I can transfer this knowledge to the next generation.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* You are working on a book, correct?

*Alex Stark:* Yeah. [Laughs]

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Think of all your knowledge! Again, a book is only *words*, not an entirely accurate portrayal of what you do, but it’s a start...

*Alex Stark:* No, the book is, I would say, 30 percent done. I had

to kind of stop it because of the move and all that but recently we started researching new formats. The content's done. I have all the pictures. I have basically all the copy but I wasn't sure about format. I think I'm going to go with something a little more interactive, and certainly digital.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Well that makes sense. Given everything you're saying, it just seems like interactive, digital, that's the way we're relating to information. It's more *satisfying*.

*Alex Stark:* Correct.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* I never thought I would say that.

*Alex Stark:* Right. There's also other reasons. To really teach, for example, understanding land you've got to go *on* the land. The next best thing is to make a movie of it. Just talking about it in the book, I'm not a good enough writer to convey what I need to convey. I think *showing* it would be a little bit better than just talking about it or writing about it. We're going to explore that a little bit to see if it happens.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Do you have a piece of land or a structure, a building or anything in mind that you would love to be able to work with, a sort of dream project?

*Alex Stark:* No, I don't actually. It's a question I've asked myself a million times and interestingly enough I get to work with lots of beautiful pieces of land and some really amazing structures and projects, but none of my own. Astrologically my karma has to do with being a catalyst for other people's development. It's right there in my feng shui astrological chart. I'm not surprised. I'm happy with it because I can go in and really help somebody else and make something magnificent out of their land and give it purpose and contribute to people's finding meaning through it without having to get personally invested in it.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* What a gift.

*Alex Stark:* But that is part of our loneliness too though. The irony isn't lost to me.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* You're opening the doors for people, "Here, go this way," and then when the door closes the person moves on. Where he or she goes is up to that person and there you are, opening the door for the next.

*Alex Stark:* Yep. But I'm good. That's my karma. Luckily one of my early teachers taught me that way back when, and it was a very smart thing to let me know because I used to spend a lot of time thinking that I needed to find my own success and it was really someone else's success that was going to generate my own. That's a blessing.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* When you heard that were you resistant at all to it or did it resonate with you as a truth?

*Alex Stark:* Well I was in my 30s when it was told to me. I had knocked my head enough and stumbled enough to realize that what I was seeking for wasn't necessarily the best for me. Feng shui astrology is very interesting in that respect because its fundamental premise is to discover what your potential is so that you can guide the individual or the client to achieve that potential. It's a little bit like knowing, "Okay, where does this individual want to go?" It's a little bit like asking, "Where do we point this canoe so that the client can get to where their soul wants to be?" It's a very powerful astrological tool to do that.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* And again, so similar to what we aim to do in the therapy room, *serving soul*. It seems like therapists would benefit greatly, as would their clients, from having this knowledge not only of themselves but of feng shui astrology in general.

*Alex Stark:* Yeah, and it also has medical applications. There's

a school of Chinese Medicine at the University of Edmonton in Canada that has a feng shui division and the reason they do it is because whenever a person signs off for medical help they send somebody to your house. They do the interview and they look at your house and so on. The reason they do it, besides it's being Chinese and culturally appropriate, is because they know that if conditions in the house aren't correct you're going to resist treatment and they know that if you're not on your life path, if you're not on the correct path, you're going to resist treatment. Isn't that interesting?

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

That's really interesting, and happens in therapy, too—resistance to treatment, only sometimes the environment is family, others, who may or may not support the work the individual is doing. Someone might come into therapy with the words, “I want to be better, I want to heal,” not even aware of that resistance.

If someone wants to find the answers to the question, “Where is my potential?” what do you advise? Not everyone's going to be able to afford to call you or to afford to go into a program so as to explore this question. So what can the average person do to begin to sort of get in touch with everything we're talking about? Is it possible?

*Alex Stark:*

Yes, of course. The most important thing that I advise people do is to develop a loving relationship with space, to really be conscious of what space says about you, how it reflects who you are and what it means to you. We have a little mantra we use a lot, “Love it, use it or lose it.” It was developed for clutter management but it has a deeper resonance because if you surround yourself with objects that are useful and that you love and you don't include things that are superfluous and do not provide your life with meaning then the canoe that's flowing down the river has a much easier trajectory. It won't get side tracked. The river itself becomes lighter. The problem with Western society particularly in the

United States is that we bury ourselves in crap in order to avoid recognizing that we're in pain.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Right. And we have endless opportunities to do so.

*Alex Stark:* I mean that's the whole mechanism. That's why we do it. We overeat. We over buy. We just collect, collect, collect, collect, trying to create a sense of security, a sense of belonging, a sense of identity through objects when in fact the only way you're going to create that sense of identity is by finding your place in the world and by honoring, of course, your ancestors and the land. That's where you are. You're *here*. You have to honor here, right now. This *now* has to be honored but people don't. They fill their garage full of crap and it's somehow for the future.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Or some nostalgia for the past, some concert T-shirt or photos, letters we can't get rid of sometimes for no known reason, and they weigh us down.

*Alex Stark:* Correct. It's either past or it's future but it's never now because right now all you need is the clothes that are on you and that's it. You don't need much. If nothing else that's one thing people can do. Now another corollary that comes from that is that the objects that surround you are going to not just help you to live a less stressful life, less struggle, but they're also going to influence what it is that you become. Your physical environment can be used as a way to nudge achievement in particular directions. You know the whole idea of vision boarding?

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Sure. Create a board that reflects your future goals and desires, so that you can begin to orient your thinking, and manifest your wishes in that direction.

*Alex Stark:* Yeah, clipped from magazines; they want happiness so they put a picture of a couple, money, and they staple \$100 bills. It's very kind of new age but there's a grain

of truth in it because if you do it in your entire space and you can manage to control the nature of the metaphoric or symbolic content of what you have around you and if the energy in that object or image is high enough you can in fact manifest what it is you're looking for. We have a little mantra that says, "What you see from your bed, what you see from your desk, what you see from your living room couch is what you become." So be really careful in those places.

I can't tell you how common it is to go to the home of somebody who's alone, lonely, can't get love and you go to their bedroom and right there across from the bed is the big, giant armoire with the closed doors or a lovely photograph of the grand canyon with nobody in it or lots of pictures of themselves, single photos of themselves. We say, "You know what? You think you could move that armoire and maybe put a picture there of a bunch of friends of yours, or a landscape with some people in it at a beach having a good time?"

Sometimes they resist, but eventually when they get around to doing it all of a sudden that relationship manifests. Now what's that about? Is it psychological? *Maybe*. It's a little bit of subconscious reinforcement. But truthfully, it's about an energetic construct surrounding you in your space. It's in your *space*. It's not in your head and it's not on a vision board on a poster. It's not an aphorism on your laptop. It's actually *in* your space.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

I get this image of how many people, particularly Americans, sit on the couch and what are they looking at is the TV.

*Alex Stark:*

The TV, yeah. An *alternate* reality.

*Lauren Gonzalez:*

Yeah. No wonder we step away and feel completely unsure of our own reality. TV gets all of our focus.

*Alex Stark:* Yeah. By extension of course there's not that much nature surrounding the house. In the suburbs they've got a clipped lawn or they're in a high rise, an apartment, with a view of another building. That feeds into that same problem. In those spaces it's even more important to surround your interior space with images, symbols, metaphors of the qualities in life that you want to have and develop.

And it can get real practical. I often suggest that students who are studying geography put a big map of the world in front of your bed or CEOs who want to expand their business internationally have a big world map somewhere that you can see and just look at. All of a sudden, guess what? That deal comes through or they get better grades. It's bizarre. It just defies logic yet it works. It works because there's a reinforcement in the space that's energetic and it's the entire space. Big energy.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* I love globes and keep one on my desk to look at while I work, always have. I've been so fortunate to be able to travel as much as I have. So is that a manifestation of this concept here in my own life?

*Alex Stark:* Yep, there you go.

*Lauren Gonzalez:* Thank you for your time, Alex, and for the important work *you're* doing in this world.

*Alex Stark:* You're welcome. Thank you.

***For more on Alex Stark and his work visit [AlexStark.com](http://AlexStark.com)***