

Feng Shui Interior Design

Feng Shui is an ancient Chinese art and science that was developed some 3000 years ago to help people balance the energies in the places they lived. It's pronounced Fung Shway and it translates to "Wind Water." In Chinese culture, the elements play an important part in everyday life, as in wind and water that bring good harvests, which in turn bring good health and prosperity.

Feng Shui is based on Taoist philosophy, which puts a great deal of stock in living in harmony with nature, and states that land is alive and brimming with energy, or chi (pronounced chee). This in turn means that your home is alive and full of chi as well and needs to be arranged in such a way that the chi can be maximized.

How can you use this Chinese art in your decorating? First, you'll need a bagua (pronounced bah-gwah) map. This map includes the eight building blocks of life, according to the Chinese Taoist philosophy: health, love, wealth, career, wisdom/knowledge, reputation/fame, children/creativity and helpful people, plus the center area of chi.

To make a bagua map, look at the structure of your home. The ideal shape is a square or rectangle, but despair not if your home is L-shaped or U-shaped. On a large piece of paper, draw a map of your home, noting where doors and windows are. If your home is L-shaped or U-shaped, use dotted lines to fill out the square or rectangle. Now divide the square into nine parts, which will correspond to each of the nine bagua areas.

The baguas are determined by the location of the front door of your house, which is considered the baseline of your bagua map. As you look in the front door of your home, the area to your right is "helpful people." The area to your left is "wisdom/knowledge," and in between those two is your "career" bagua. The center three baguas, left to right, are "family," "chi" and "children/creativity." The upper left corner is "wealth," upper middle is "fame/reputation" and the upper right is "marriage." In other words, it looks like this:

Wealth	Fame	Marriage
Family	Chi	Children
Wisdom	Career	Helpful people

Front door

Once you've drawn out your bagua map, you are ready to place symbolic objects in the corresponding areas to maximize the chi in those areas. For instance, in your wealth area, you can place a bowl of coins, or perhaps hang framed foreign currency. Experts also recommend hanging a round clear crystal on a red cord, which represents wealth. Hang wedding photos and place keepsakes from your wedding in your marriage area, and place pictures of your children in the children area. You get the idea. The center chi area should remain as uncluttered as possible.

There are also specific colors to use in Feng Shui decorating. Each color has a meaning and will help enhance the various areas in different ways:

Red: Attraction, warmth, strength (Use this color sparingly. Too much red can cause arguments.)

Green: Health, potential

Purple: Spiritual guidance

Yellow: Energy, life

Black: Mood, perception (Use this color sparingly, as too much can be draining.)

Pink: Love, romance

Decorating Smaller Spaces

A lot of people are downsizing these days, whether by choice or necessity. Having a smaller space presents decorating and design challenges, about which misconceptions abound. The number one misconception? That using white will make your space look larger. Not so, say experts. Another mistaken belief is that less and smaller furniture is the only option open to small-space owners. But decorating limited space is more about placement of furnishings and careful color usage.

Let's start with color. It may seem counterintuitive, but sharp, bright colors work best in smaller spaces, with plenty of negative space between. Experts also advise using splashes of color in unexpected places like the insides of bookcases, windowsills and radiators. Try picking one wall in every room as your focal or accent wall and paint it a deeper color than the other three.

When it comes to the kitchen, you can afford to go very bold. One hot trend you've no doubt noticed is the deep red kitchen. Another room people tend to go neutral is the bathroom, but this is another place you can have fun with color.

Here are more tips to make the most of your small space:

1. Use mirrors. This isn't so you can check your hair whenever you want, it's to reflect light and create more depth. It really works. Hang mirrors opposite your windows. Hang groups of mirrors as you would groups of pictures.
2. If you have a studio apartment (meaning just one room), don't be afraid to paint different areas of the room different colors. Use screens, hanging fabric, even detached hanging windows to break up the space.
3. You probably have extremely limited storage

space, so the best thing in the kitchen is to hang everything.

4. And speaking of storage, you want to think double duty. Use a trunk for an end table, putting your winter sweaters inside. Buy furniture, such as ottomans and tables, that have storage space inside. Put up plenty of shelving. Just be sure to arrange what goes on the shelves in a visually pleasing way.
5. Go ahead and display your collections. Have antique lunchboxes? Stack them on shelves. It will add color and fun to your space.
6. You must create negative space wherever you can in order to reduce a cluttered, claustrophobic feeling.
7. Use sheer window coverings to let in the light.
8. Most importantly, let your own personal style shine through regardless of how much space you have to work with. Let your space reflect who you are, and visitors won't even notice the size.