

INTERIORS



Healing homes

Feng shui is back and I'm banking on it to help sell my house, says *Jane Alexander*

Feng shui – the ancient Chinese art of house healing that became a craze in the Nineties – is being resurrected. From posh, new London condos to cluttered family living rooms, crystals and wind chimes are once again twinkling and tinkling. It evolved around 5,000 years ago in China, but in its British heyday everyone from Madonna to Richard Branson and even, allegedly, members of the Royal family were using this esoteric “acupuncture for houses” – and feng shui consultants

earned more than architects (or so an architect friend grumbled). “It went quiet for a time, but feng shui is definitely coming back,” says Gina Lazenby, author of several books on the subject (thehealthyhome.com). Even Battersea Power Station has been given the treatment, according to consultant Tram Anh, of property group RFR. “Westerners have also turned to this ancient discipline in the hope that it will bring some much-needed peace and balance to their modern-day lives.” If you can get the flow right, good health and good fortune should

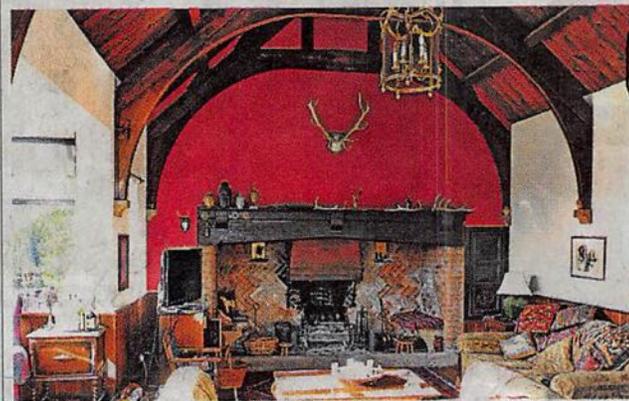
follow. If the feng shui is all wrong, you risk falling prey to bad luck and misfortune, she warns.

I first came across feng shui when I was broke, working for a small magazine and living in a north London Victorian terrace. I interviewed William Spear, a New York-based feng shui consultant, who told me my house was “missing its money corner”.

The “cure” involved heavy plant pots and strategically placed mirrors. With nothing to lose, I followed his instructions and within a week I’d been headhunted and my salary quadrupled. Intrigued, I wrote a book, *Spirit of the Home*, and I haven’t taken any chances since.

I’m currently house hunting and, as I surf the web, I skip over the pretty pictures and click on the floor plan. It offers a better prediction of whether a place will be a warm, happy home,

A kitchen given the feng shui treatment by Tram Anh, consultant at RFR, above; Jane Alexander’s living room using red, a high energy colour on the feng shui palette



a vibrant exciting one, or a disaster. It sounds nuts but I've learnt not to ignore the feng shui flow.

Back in 2007, my husband, Adrian, and I were looking for a family home in the small Somerset town of Dulverton. We'd fallen in love with its independent shops and award-winning pubs. Surrounded by forest and moorland with the River Barle tumbling through, it was, we reasoned, the perfect place to bring up a child. However, we simply couldn't find a house that fitted our needs, with character, space, a large garden, privacy, views and yet just a bibulous stumble from the pub.

Then she found Woodcote. Part of an old sporting hotel with a reputation for being "frisky and a bit wild" back in its heyday in the Sixties. Its décor was firmly stuck in the Seventies and the bathroom and kitchen deserved museum status. It was, however, blissfully quirky - Georgian with Arts and Crafts add-ons plus a vast vaulted living room built in the Thirties as the hotel's party room.

"I love it," I said to Adrian. "But it's a feng shui nightmare." But it had "good bones". It was nicely symmetrical with generous proportions and no missing corners, even though the old hotel layout was an energy void, with long, dark corridors and an ill-placed kitchen. Its position was perfect and the garden was gorgeous. "It just needs a little remodelling," I said brightly.

A year of builders and dust ensued. We rewired, replumbed, repaired and replaced. We created a new kitchen and banished the old bathroom to the skip.

The house looked great but it still didn't feel right. So I called in the experts. A local feng shui consultant said, diplomatically, that I'd been a little too enthusiastic: crystals were prescribed. My office was moved and mirrors went up on the walls of the loo to stop "financial energy leaking out".

This was easy to do but I can almost hear Mark Sakautzky, consultant at the International Feng Shui Association, give a little sigh. "Feng Shui is nearly always publicised as some sort of quick fix interior decoration, but it is energy architecture, based on vortex mathematics, acupuncture in land, garden and house."

Whether easy or hard, there is resurgence of interest. "The awareness of feng shui has been maturing in Britain," says Sarah McAllister, another feng shui master.

"Forward-thinking estate agents and property developers are now seeing it

CREATE INNER PEACE HOW TO GET THE LOOK

1 Decluttering a child's bedroom



Clutter builds up and takes time to clear. Identify what is causing the clutter then work back from there, says Yasmin Choppin at Houzz.co.uk. This room now has built-in storage solutions.

2 A kitchen is not the heart of the home



The kitchen is linked to health. Don't put it at the centre of the home. The middle room should be peaceful, a snug. Don't place the stove opposite the sink, as the fire and water elements clash.

3 Bringing serenity to your bathroom



Traditional feng shui enthusiasts give bathrooms a bad rap because water, like chi, flows out. Put the plug in, keep the toilet seat down, add dimmer lights, and mirrors to keep energy in.

Bedroom and kitchen in artist Joanna Zoob's house, featured on Houzz.co.uk; bathroom by Feng Shui consultant Mark Sakautzky

Mirrors went up on the loo walls to stop financial energy leaking out

as a really valuable asset," she adds.

Eight years on we have put Woodcote on the market. Our son James has moved to sixth-form college, and it's time to return to the city. We're hopeful of a swift sale - after all, how many houses have not only been thoroughly refurbished physically but have also had a total energetic overhaul?

Woodcote, Dulverton, Somerset, is being marketed by Seddons (seddons.com) at a guide price of £575,000.