



The Music Room, Brighton Pavillion

october inspiration...feng shui stories

You don't have to understand Feng Shui principles to intuitively feel the difference in the energy of a good space as opposed to the energy of a space that just feels "off". It may not always be clear why, but if the room or building has a negative energy flow, most times you can sense that something *isn't right*. Think about other spaces you know where, as soon as you take your first step over the threshold, you can actually feel harmony and positive energy. You might feel lighter, inspired, and more energized. That is because energy is flowing in a positive way. In Feng Shui that energy is called the *qi* (pronounced chee) or life force. Keeping the life force flowing is the simplest definition of Feng Shui I can think of.

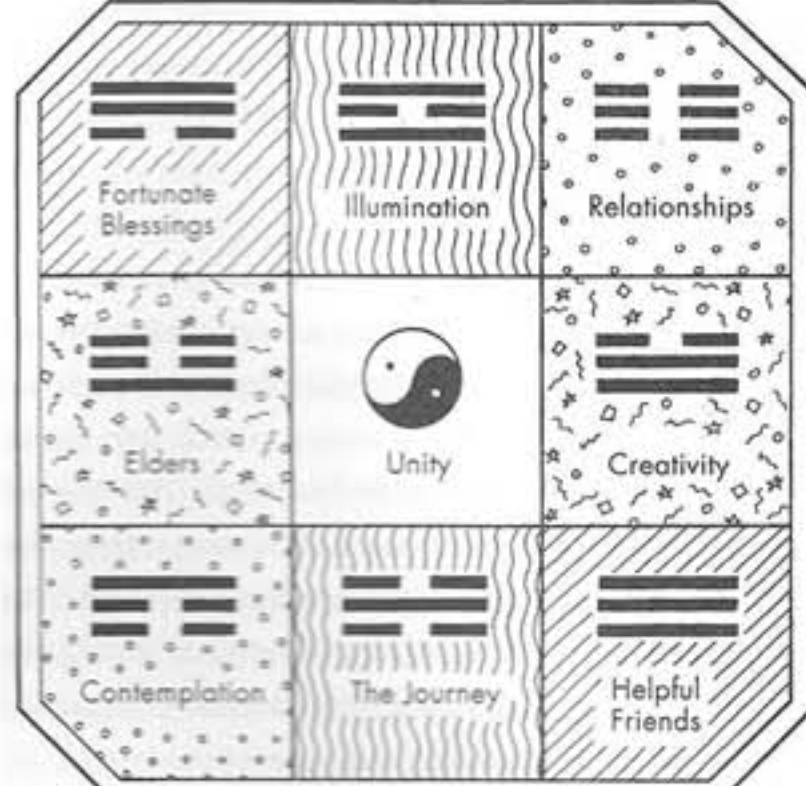
I have always been interested in the study of Feng Shui, but it wasn't until I had the opportunity to collaborate with a Feng Shui Master on a project several years ago, that I understood why some interiors are more successful than others. When designing an interior, I operated solely on hunches and basic interior design principles when working on layouts, fabric and color schemes. I was influenced by my clients' preferences, the existing architecture and my own intuition. I knew certain Feng Shui basics such as...if possible face a desk to the entrance of a room; never position a bed between two facing doors; do not place a headboard in front of a window, etc, etc. But those were just common sense design principles... weren't they? I was about to find out that many design principles I learned had origins and ties to Feng Shui.

Before ground was broken, our clients hired a consultant to site their new home and they wanted his opinions on the interior as well. I have to admit that I had a few misgivings. My limited knowledge of Feng Shui at that time consisted of furniture placed on diagonals and chimes and mirrors hung in odd locations. Having a classical orientation when it comes to architecture and interiors, these were practices I just couldn't begin to relate to. Besides, we were already collaborating with an architect and a landscape architect on this project and had completed the layouts, finishes and furnishings for the first floor. After all that work, we would now be subject to yet another consultant's opinions? Would we have to start all over again?

The first meeting with our clients' consultant was scheduled to take place at our office. I was informed that he wasn't just any Feng Shui consultant, but a well-known and very well respected Feng Shui Master who had sited many hotels the world over for optimal energy flow. I don't know what I expected, but when I answered the door, I was surprised and a bit relieved to see he wasn't donning a flowing robe, or clutching a geomantic compass under his arm.



Above: Baqua pattern on the ceiling paper.
Right: Baqua illustration from *Feng Shui Made Easy*, by William Spear.



After some general introductions, we sat facing each other with the furniture layouts spread out between us. I walked him through the design for each room and presented the correlating fabrics and color schemes. He commented very little until I showed him the ceiling paper we selected for the Entry and Upstairs Hall ceilings. He smiled and explained that the design of the ceiling paper we chose was called a *bagua* and the fact that we selected it for this project was very auspicious. The *bagua*, an eight square trigram, was the diagram or map that he used in his Feng Shui practice. As we moved through the design, the *bagua* seemed to repeat itself over and over in the patterns of other fabrics, tile and carpeting. Was this a random coincidence or an intuitive connection (Deep inhale... deep exhale)? Whatever the reason, we were off to a good start!

To my great relief, there were only a few changes to our original design. In the office shared by our clients, he wanted to see more blue. He had strong opinions regarding the children's bedroom layouts as well as the master bedroom color scheme. Since we hadn't begun the design for the second floor, he was able to give us direction on colors and materials that maximized compatible energy and flow for each member of the family. There was no mention of diagonal furniture placement or mirrors hung at odd angles. Our furniture layouts remained as they were.



Tigers on the sofa fabric represent Quan Yin energy, the stripes denote an auspicious mixture of Yin and Yang. Bagua pattern repeated on the custom carpet.

On a site meeting "walk thru" much later in the project, the Feng Shui Consultant joined us to do a bit of "problem solving". How could we access northern light in the Master Bedroom? The room had windows on the south wall only, and he felt very strongly that our clients also needed access to northern light. We quickly divided into two teams, the *Believers* (Client, Designer & Feng Shui Consultant) and the *Skeptics* (Architect & Builder).

After a somewhat lengthy tug of war, we all agreed that we would cut a fixed window above the bed and access a light source from a window facing north located in the attic (It's not hard to understand why the architect and builder wouldn't want a large moon shaped hole to be cut out of an already primed wall). The custom window was eventually glazed with frosted glass and it allowed sufficient light to enter the room satisfying energy flow from the North. *High Five for the Believers!*



Half moon shape of clearstory window above the French doors was repeated over the bed in order to allow North light into the room.

After completing that project, I certainly became a believer. On a trip to London later that summer, I made a trip to Brighton Beach by train to tour the newly restored Brighton Pavilion. The Brighton Pavilion is a palace built at the seaside resort of Brighton by King George IV. It is an extraordinary building designed in Indian and Oriental styles and the Interiors are a fantastical showcase of gilt and chinoiserie. The Music Room, one of the last rooms to be built and most highly decorated, is adorned with gilt dragons both painted as well as in three dimension. It was barely finished when George IV died, and when the palace passed to Queen Victoria, she decided that the palace at Brighton wasn't suited to a family of nine children. She stripped many of the fixtures and furnishings from the interiors and had them installed at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. The Brighton Pavilion was later restored, and many of the original decorations and furniture was returned from Osborne House as well as Buckingham Palace.

In 1975, after the extensive restoration, the Music Room was severely damaged by fire. Repair to the ceiling took more than a decade and was barely finished when, the hurricane of 1987 hit. This time the room suffered even more damage. A large stone ball on top of one of the minarets fell through the newly restored ceiling and imbedded itself in the carpet and floor.

Our guide explained that after two major acts of God, a Feng Shui expert was called in and consulted. It was advised that the dragons on the ceiling were in conflict with the carved serpents on the mantel that had been recently reproduced from the original. Evidently, serpents and dragons don't live harmoniously, or at least not the dragons and serpents of Brighton. We were told that a "correction" was installed so that whatever the problem was, now all is well. Since I was then a believer, I wasn't at all surprised.

After all, it's not good to upset Mother Nature!

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