



Feng shui, geomancy's Oriental cousin, may be 3000 years old, but it is having an increasing influence on today's building design in the West. Jessica Cargill Thompson reports.

good vibrations

AS IN-HOUSE ARCHITECT FOR THE Hongkong & Shanghai bank during the 1960s, Roger Williams was called on as part of the same job to design a pair of houses in the New Territories at Clearwater Bay. The houses were on the side of one mountain, known locally as the white dragon, with beautiful views out to another, the azure dragon. A swimming pool was built down the hill, reached by a series of white steps running down the hillside and through an elegant round gateway.

Shortly after the houses were finished, hurricane Wanda hit the island, causing serious damage and claiming many lives. The local Family or "tong", which lost many members during the hurricane, blamed the storm on Williams, and on the new houses in particular. Building on one hill and not on the other had caused an imbalance. The white dragon had antagonised the azure dragon by showing its teeth (the steps) and opening its mouth (the gateway); hence the storm.

The tong's claims were upheld in court and the Hongkong & Shanghai bank paid

out HK\$1m (£83 333) in compensation, while Williams was ordered to fill in the gateway and remove the steps.

Williams had come up against the principles of feng shui, or fung soy as it is called in Cantonese. Literally translated, this means good wind and good water, and is a way of achieving the best energy flow through and around a building. In this sense, it is not dissimilar to the Western study of geomantics (see right).

Although the principles of feng shui, based on the ancient teachings of the I Ching, or Unifying Principle, are 3000 years old, they are still taken into account in buildings across the Orient. Multinational companies such as the Hongkong & Shanghai bank consult feng shui experts before planning a building, and even Sir Norman Foster was asked to change his designs for the bank's headquarters in Hong Kong because it did not have good feng shui.

The practice is now gaining popularity outside the Orient, reinterpreted to suit other cultures. The Feng Shui Network, set up in London 18 months ago, is

attracting groups of 150 to its workshops. Its co-founder, US consultant William Spear, is an adviser to multimillion-dollar urban planning projects in Spain and the Middle East. His book *Feng Shui Made Easy* sold out within two weeks of publication last October.

"I try to distinguish the religious and ritual practices from the architectural and design functions of feng shui," says Spear. "My approach is not to demand a strict aesthetic based on what colours or plants happen to be considered lucky or attractive in the Orient. Instead, I adapt the design principles of energy flow to other cultures." With clients in the UK, USA and Middle East, it is important to view each project as individual.

Gina Lazenby, co-founder of the FSN and its spokesperson in London, is keen to demystify the science and remove its sandals-and-crystals image.

"Everyone and everything is an energy-vibrating body. That is just quantum physics," she explains. "If we can understand how energy moves, we can create an environment where we feel