

Feng Shui Puts Your Furniture and Your Life in Order

By JOANNE KAUFMAN

New York

"It feels great here. This is a friendly home," says the *feng shui* consultant William Spear, walking through the entrance of my apartment. "It's not a formal family when there are books in the hall. You're very open, and spreading."

"There's no strong blockage of energy," adds Mr. Spear, 46, author of the recently published guide "Feng Shui Made Easy: Designing Your Life With the Ancient Art of Placement" (HarperCollins, 256 pages, \$12). Practitioners like Mr. Spear and converts like Donald Trump believe adherence to *feng shui* (pronounced *fung shway*) precepts about the positioning of furniture, rooms and buildings spells prosperity in the workplace, health and happiness in the home.

Frequently described by Mr. Spear as the acupuncture of space—like acupuncture, *feng shui* is based on the study of electromagnetic energy lines—the 3,000-year-old Asian art, still widely practiced in Asia, is being embraced by Westerners who want to beef up their love lives or their bottom lines. The goal is the smooth flow of energy, achieving harmony with nature. "It's all about the connection between the external environment and the inner self," sums up Mr. Spear, who has offices in Litchfield, Conn., and London. Beware the staircase situated directly opposite an entryway. That's just begging good fortune to hightail it smack out the door. Make sure your desk faces the door to permit easy scoping of prospective visitors. And remember that an injudiciously placed bathroom flushes money right down the you know what.

Mr. Trump is incorporating *feng shui* principles into his latest development,

Riverside South—a Manhattan project, by the way, with Japanese financing. According to Mr. Spear, one of an estimated 75 *feng shui* consultants practicing in the U.S., the Donald's got lots of company. "As American business people come in contact with players from the Pacific Rim, they can't ignore that these people are using philosophies and looking at their bottom lines with different sets of glasses than Westerners," he says.

As Mr. Spear walks through my apartment, he explains that there are nine specific elements in every structure. Working from a grid called the *bagua*, he is able to chart zones pertaining to career (Mr. Spear's preferred location is "the journey"), wealth ("fortunate blessings") and children ("creativity"). "That's the fortunate blessings corner," he says, walking into my husband's office and pointing to a slice of desk occupied by a fax machine. "Put a plant there with rounded leaves," he counsels. "Plants are manifestations of upward and outward energy."

The insistence on rounded leaves is rooted in a belief that pointy foliage is subtly irritating. It has nothing to do with issues of taste or style. "If you like Stickley but a chair's sharp edge is pointing at a pathway of energy and diminishing the life force *chi*, I'm more likely to suggest that you move it than replace it," says Mr. Spear. "I'm not interested in challenging someone's aesthetics. But I might suggest that the colors in a bedroom are responsible for someone's insomnia [too much red] or someone's lack of passion [not enough red]."

"There's a grace and flow to all your furniture," Mr. Spear notes, continuing his

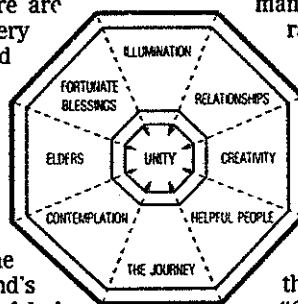
authorized snoop. "What it's doing is keeping your body and mind more flexible than you can imagine." But all the news is not good. The mirror in the master bathroom, he points out, is so low it chops off my husband's head above the eyebrows. "Raise the mirror," orders Mr. Spear. "It's cutting off your husband's aura."

Aura? Despite this rather regrettable choice of words, Mr. Spear has nothing of the mystic in his dress and demeanor, a fact that surprises—and relieves—a good many of the 300 private and corporate clients he sees every year.

Fees range from \$200-\$500 per hour for small jobs to \$1,500-\$2,500 per diem for projects such as laying out the plans for a hotel-conference center in Capetown, South Africa, or a 180-acre resort in Spain, including the placement of the pool and tennis courts.

"Clients think I might come wearing a robe and waving crystals," says the bearded Mr. Spear, who's wearing dark trousers, a pullover sweater and has a reassuring manner and the air of a hip rabbi. "I know a lot about the deeper mysticism of what this is all about. I can tell people it's a question of the mountain over heaven and that an object must be reoriented so that there's more auspicious *chi* coming into the earth part of the *bagua*. Or I can say 'You need to move the stairs so that the people feel more balanced as they enter the front door and more welcome into the space.' When I speak in the second way 99% of the people say 'Yes, that makes sense.' And if people still think it doesn't make sense? 'I'm not interested in twisting arms,' he says coolly. "I don't need people to believe."

Mr. Spear grew up in Pittsburgh, where



The *bagua*

his father, a cryptoanalyst during World War II, introduced him to puzzles and number games. He especially liked the so-called magic squares, a grid of nine squares adding up to 15 in every direction. At summer camp, he came upon a counselor's copy of the "I Ching," subsequently discovering that "the whole oracle" of the book was his beloved magic square. At the University of Cincinnati, Mr. Spear made it his business to learn all he could about the Far East, including architecture and design. After graduation, he continued his studies of *feng shui* in Europe, then began taking on small assignments—stores, apartments and homes—gradually branching out to design more expansive projects and to lead *feng shui* seminars.

"What Bill talks about makes intuitive sense," says Lee Epstein, chief executive officer of Decision Analytics, a San Francisco-based investment consulting firm, who hired Mr. Spear to apply *feng shui* principles to a 5,500-square-foot office renovation job. "We use sales teams of two people and had thought of having their desks face each other. Bill felt that would be confrontational and suggested we set them at a 45-degree angle with a plant in between. Whether that's flowing the energy in the right direction I will never know. But what he says seems to have worked."

The novelist Cathy Cash Spellman has just called Mr. Spear because she hasn't had a healthy day since moving into her new residence and wants him to come by for a consultation. "In such cases I often find that the corner of the house that rules blessing and health is missing," he says.

Ms. Spellman, like all Mr. Spear's clients, had better be prepared for heavy inquiry: How often does she feel blessed? Is she doing what she really wants? What's her relationship with the divine? "All these questions," Mr. Spear says, "are aimed at aspects of their lives that are symbolically represented in the way that they relate to their space." Cures for troubled spaces include plants, lights, crystal and mirrors to activate, sedate, remove or redirect energy. Only once has Mr. Spear told a client to abandon all hope and move out. "That," he says, "was the person who lived a mile and a half from a nuclear power plant."

Now if Mr. Spear could only get his own house in order. His worse nightmare is that one day the National Enquirer will show up in Litchfield to do a searing exposé on the *feng shui* of the 100-year-old Victorian farmhouse he lives in with his composer wife Joan and their three sons. "It's given me great respect for how to make my recommendations more practical rather than ideological," he says. "Like where do you put the dirty laundry? How do you keep your pathways clear when there are Legos in every corner and your three kids have bicycles?"

Ms. Kaufman is a writer in New York.