

Connecticut Q&A: **William Spear**

Ban the Cactus, Bring On the Feng Shui

By JACQUELINE WEAVER

FENG SHUI, which means wind and water, is a practice that originated in Asia 3,000 years ago, a guide on how to build and design work, living and other spaces to maximize the flow of beneficial energy. Practitioners and devotees, among them Donald Trump, say a building that has adhered to the feng shui principles fosters prosperity and success in business and harmony and happiness in the home.

William Spear is a macrobiotic teacher and counselor who explains that just as acupuncture works by pinpointing surges and blockages of energy within the body, feng shui attempts to locate and use the energy in our environment.

Mr. Spear, whose book, tentatively titled, "Fung Shei Made Easy: Designing Your Life With the Ancient Art of Placement," is due out this summer, was interviewed recently in his office in Litchfield. Following are excerpts from that conversation.

Q. How do you pronounce feng shui?

A. Fung shway is the Anglicization of the characters in Chinese; feng shwee is the Japanese.

Q. How did you get interested in it?

A. My father was a cryptographer in World War II. When I was 4, he taught me something called the magic square, which was just this tick-tack-toe box of nine numbers that added up to 15 in all directions. The magic square is also the numerological basis for the Chinese Book of Change, "I Ching." When I went to college I was very attracted to Asian studies and architecture and design. Later, I began to design little things here and there — small stores, people's apartments and houses.

Q. What is feng shui?

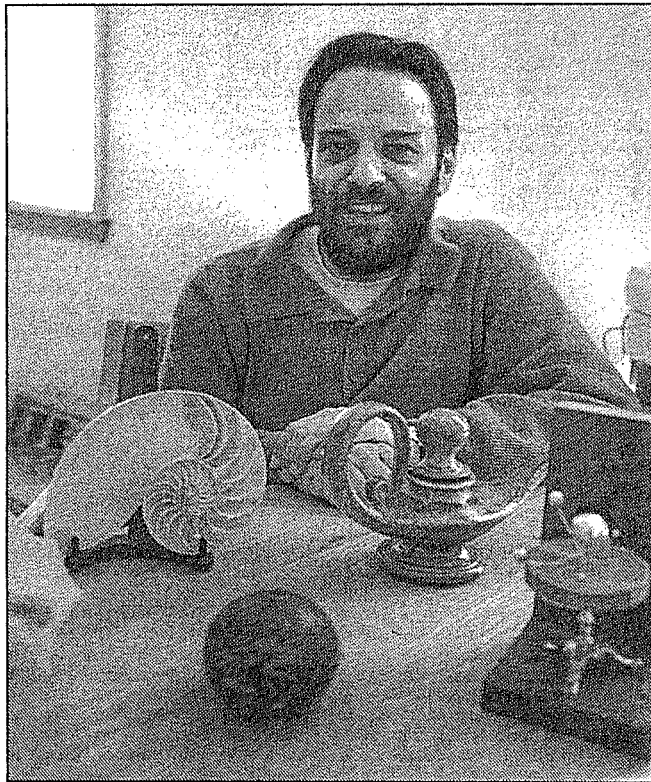
A. The integration of the outside world with the internal environment based on the study of electromagnetic energy lines. The idea is that by aligning your design on a physical as well as spiritual level, you can exert positive changes in your life by adding more positive ch'i, or energy, to your environment.

The walking sidewalk in the connector between the terminals at O'Hare Airport in Chicago is a masterpiece of feng shui. As far as you can see is this moving sidewalk, and you think, "I'm never going to make my plane." But while you're on it there's sound, music, mobiles, different colored panels. And all of a sudden you're at the other end.

Now the time it takes you to get from point A to point B is the same time, but it is almost a kind of created environment specifically designed to enhance a purpose — that is, moving someone from point A to point B through the dissolution of time. There is no feeling of time passing as you move on the sidewalk.

Q. What are some well-known buildings where feng shui is used?

A. Marks & Spencers department store in London, the Hyatt Singapore Hotel in Singapore, some overseas branches of Chemical Bank. Donald Trump is using feng shui in Riverside West, and Richard Branson went public with his use of feng shui when he opened the London-Hong Kong route for Virgin Airways. Be-



Helen Neafsey for The New York Times

William Spear, in his Litchfield office, uses objects and design to locate and use the energy in the environment.

fore, to say someone had done feng shui on your building was a liability, or worse. That has changed in the last five years. Today, there are many people who brag about having their property feng shui'd.

Q. How do you compensate for poor feng shui in existing buildings?

A. By using things that activate ch'i, such as bright objects, light, the placement of plants and living things, sparkly items like crystals and faceted glass, vivid art work, mirrors and sound, through both ordinary things such as music and wind chimes and other mobile-like sound-producing installations.

Q. Cactus plants are considered bad feng shui. Why?

A. Cactus plants are fine in a large environment — the desert expanse. When placed in a cramped environment, the thorns and prickles are subtly irritating on an unconscious level.

Q. You do work with gambling casinos. Could you give an example of changes you have recommended?

A. I worked on a plan for a \$550 million casino in Australia. The architects had made a classic error. The casino was to be built on an elevation with huge banks of escalators and stairways. Down the middle of the escalators they had cascading fountains all the way down. I told them that if you send water going out of your casino into the ocean, you might just as well hand money out.

Water is symbolic of money, and you want it flowing in, not out. What I suggested instead was to shoot the water up from one level to the next.

Q. What are some of the "secrets"?

casino owners are aware of, and how do these relate to feng shui?

A. Placing the gambler's back to the door takes his power away, leaves him more vulnerable, and gives the dealer or croupier control. The placement of tables at angles, employing cutting ch'i to diminish the energy of the gamblers. The placement of toilets and rest areas in the area of "fortunate blessing," where the gamblers symbolically flush their money down the drain.

This is seen in all of the Ladbroke's in London, not coincidentally. There is a famous installation at a casino in Macao, a giant saber hanging overhead as you enter the door, appearing ready to slice you like a guillotine, chopping you, minimizing you. There is a casino in Lisbon with tiled mirrors on the walls all around the betting areas; when the gambler looks at himself, he has the sense of being chopped into a million pieces.

Q. What do you look at first when looking at a house?

A. The primary thing that is universal in feng shui is the movement of ch'i on the land. The words feng shui don't imply directly the breeze and the stream, it's more the flow of this energy in a gentle way, a clear bright way. So in siting the house it would be important that it would have protection from the wind and the elements; that it be backed up in some way by a slight rise, a hillside, or a mountain; that it not be exposed at the top nor be at the very bottom of a valley, and that it not have an obstruction in front of it, like big trees or boulders or rocks because you want the door of ch'i, the door of energy, to be unobstructed.

Q. What about the water?

A. If water comes from behind you and goes down a hill and out as if it were going out your front door, it's implying the energy in the area is moving away from you. You want it to be such that your door will be able to get the energy of water coming toward it or passing close by. If there is a stream nearby, you would want it to flow in a direction that would be as though it were flowing into your front door. The river flow could be passing by your door, or passing next to your house, flowing down, but not behind you and away from you.

Q. What about the interior?

A. The first impression is important, whether one walks into a house where the door opens into a large hallway that feels warm and inviting, or whether you open into a wall or door, or opposite another door and window, which means energy would flow through quickly. If the front door opens opposite a stairway that means energy might flow right out the front door.

The placement of kitchen and toilets is important because they involve the elements of fire and water, which are key. There are no fundamental rules except that they would logically not be joined.

Q. How can you make feng shui adaptable to different cultures?

A. Many feng shui installations favor Oriental motifs, which are often at sharp contrast to modern design or Victorian antiques. But instead of a convex mirror mounted on a red and black plaque with symbols from the I Ching used to deflect negative ch'i, it is just as powerful to use a shiny brass convex door knocker. You don't have to make your environment look like a Chinese restaurant to practice feng shui.

Q. How is feng shui different from interior decorating?

A. I'm not interested in changing the way in which you want to live. If you like Art Deco furniture, or Victorian, or whatever, there are still going to be some simple placement rules and there will be an attempt to bring harmony to that area.

I'm not the design police and I don't want to be the designer per se. In fact, I work much better with designers and architects who already have an understanding of the structure and form and function of things, and then I can refine that, or enhance that.

Q. What is good feng shui in an office?

A. If you are doing an executive office, the desk should be placed caty-corner to the door in a powerful position with a strong solid wall behind. It should not be in a direct line facing a doorway because there's energy coming straight in the door, which should not go straight into the desk. There should be no door behind the desk, or preferably no window directly behind, or vivid art work over the executive's head so that people are distracted.

Q. Does the White House have good feng shui?

A. Not terribly, no. In color terms, they like red flowers very much, and white flowers. They need yellow flowers, badly. Yellow is gathering energy. Yellow flowers around the White House would make a huge difference.