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WELLNESS DESIGN

Classical *Feng Shui* for your Yoga Shala

Words: Sarah McAllister

On a recent trip to the USA I was so happy to discover that Chicago O'Hare airport had its own yoga room up on the mezzanine level of Terminal 3. It is ideally positioned in the light-filled Rotunda, adjacent to the O'Hare Urban Garden, with its leafy green hydroponics that instantly feel soothing. It is a simple room, with large mirror and several mats and foam rollers. Two other people arrived shortly after me, so it was definitely a space that was appreciated and regularly used. I am so lucky that my feng shui work takes me all over the world, so I have seen the inside of many yoga shalas (Goa, Devon, London, Palo Alto, Santa Monica, Topanga, Sedona, Scottsdale) and couldn't help but notice the Feng Shui of the space, and whether it was supporting or not supporting the experience of the teacher and the students.

Increasingly, space is being seen as a wellbeing tool - rather than people being seduced by the visual effects of a design alone, more consciousness is being used about the energetic impact of a space. So let's first look at how the physical form and energy of a building are closely related.

THE 'BODY' OF A BUILDING

The way a building 'sits' in its environment is strikingly similar to how a body needs to sit to feel comfortable. When you sit down to do pranayama, given the choice would you sit looking at a mountain with the sea behind you, or would you want the view of the sea in front of you? If you had your eyes closed, would you feel more secure with the slope in front of you or behind you? I know that the majority of you will consider the mountain behind you the most secure and the view in front of you the most natural and inspiring.

A building is exactly the same. It has a backbone (the back or 'sitting' of the structure) and a face (the frontage) and mouth (the main door). We could be forgiven for thinking this is just a convenient metaphor, but actually, it makes logical sense. Energy comes in through the front mouth (feeding) and goes out through the waste pipes (the loos!) and the back or side doors. Between entering through the front door and leaving the property it is hopefully free to circulate easily (like the veins carrying blood) without too many obstacles. There is also an emotional heart of the home, which is often the kitchen because of the fire element, or the cosy living room with a natural fire. Fire element is associated with the heart energy in Traditional Chinese Medicine (of which Feng Shui is one of the '8 Brocades') and with the emotions of joy and feelings of love. Hopefully your property can also store good energy, just as the kidneys store vitality essence, and quite often the back garden is a good storage point – unless it slopes steeply away of course. In reality, such as in the case of apartments, there are many many different configurations of these principles and it takes a trained eye to assess them correctly, but the core principles remain – we want activity at the front and stillness at the back.

NOURISHING THE BUILDING

Just like the Chi Kung Wu Chi stance of arms slightly circled at the front, we ideally want our building to have arms (sides) in the landscaping so that it can draw energy towards it. Quite often when a store or a home fronts immediately on to a narrow pavement it can struggle to get customers or energy into the space. We need the arms to draw the nourishment towards us, just as we feed ourselves. This can be as simple as a trough with miniature fir trees or brightly coloured seasonal pot plants. Something that draws the attention of passersby, even if it literally cannot physically draw them in with the shape, it can still attract chi –

“where attention goes energy flows”.

Given that yoga is a powerful self-help tool for holistic wellbeing, it makes perfect sense that it is practiced in an environment conducive to vitality and health. The tiny yoga space at Chicago airport proved that a yoga shala doesn't have to be fancy to be effective, and it was ideal for people passing through. For a more permanent class offering though, you would ideally incorporate some Feng Shui principles as follows:

➤ Selecting the Building or Plot

If you are fortunate enough to be designing your own yoga space or viewing several spaces then do take into account a few basics. Just as we prefer a back support to lean against or at least a little cushion to perch on, it is the same with a building - the 'armchair' formation is one which has a high back in the form of a fence or treelike or high wall and a continued boundary either side of the property (the sides of the arm chair) and with a more open vista towards the front. There are exceptions to this, but in general you want to have a high secure back.



➤ Protecting the Kidney chi

When there is no support at the back, you will feel restless and inexplicably anxious or expend too much energy. This is how we feel when sat in a restaurant at the worst table and with our back to the main thoroughfare of serving staff coming and going. It is very hard to relax. It is the same with a home or yoga centre - it needs to have good protection and quietude at the back.



➤ **Teacher position**

Place the teacher in the power position, not the weak position. This means that he or she will be sat with their back to a solid wall (even if mirrored) and ideally furthest away from the main door into the space. If there are several doors as can often be the case, try to sit so you have a view of both of them. This means the teacher can subconsciously relax and has a good visual command of the space so they can look after and better hold space for the students.



➤ **Spiritual Protection**

Place a spiritual icon of choice in the Northwest of the space to watch over the classes. If possible raise it higher than the height of a tall person so that people look up to it, as a symbol of higher consciousness.



➤ **Stagnant energy & Space Clearing**

A practice closely related to Feng Shui is energetic space clearing, which addresses ancient predecessor chi and when done professionally can also heal any geopathic stress affecting the space. A quick self-help tip is to burn sustainably sourced Palo Santo or Sage sticks to cleanse the space.



➤ **Air quality**

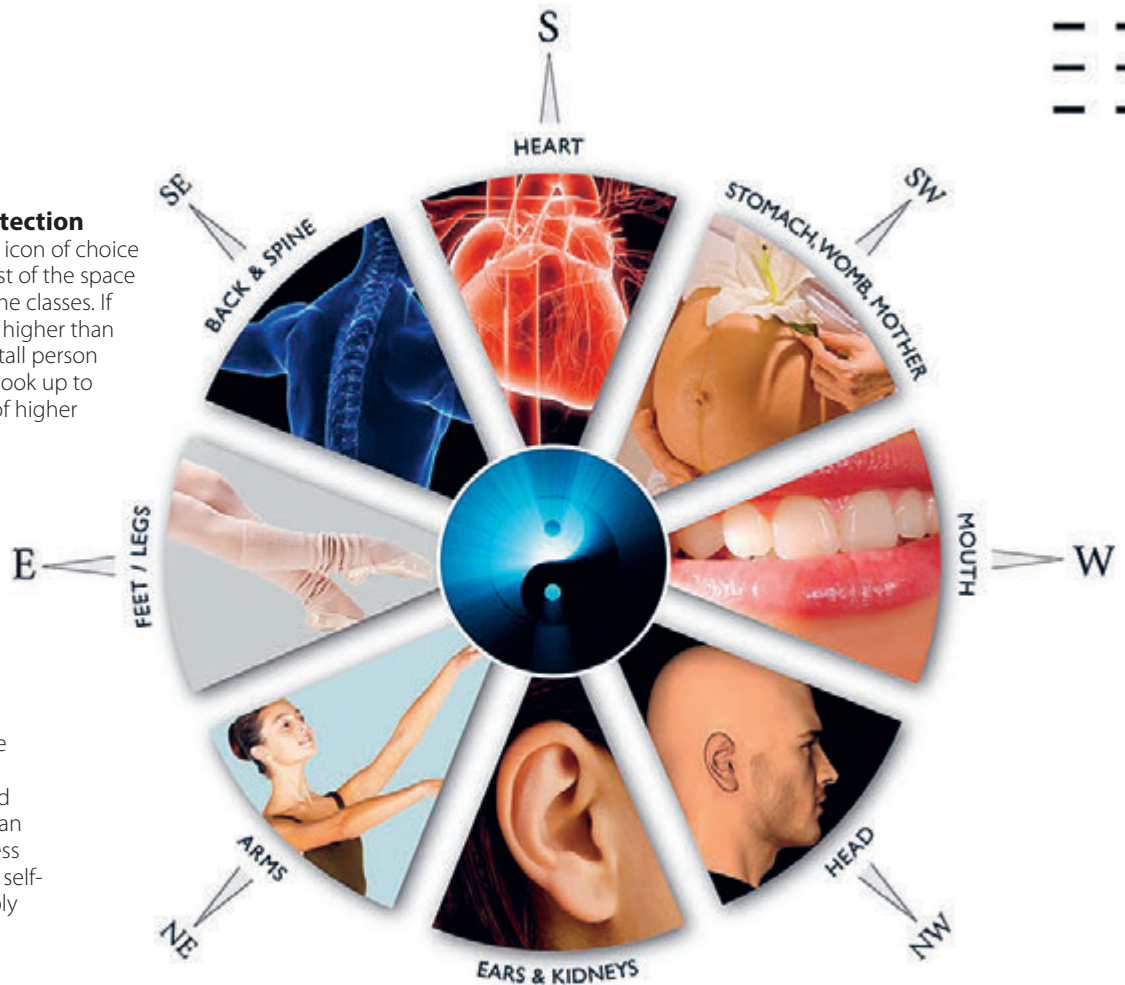
with the regular passage of groups of people, air can get stifling inside a yoga room. No matter how cold it is outside, always open any windows in between classes to move fresh air through the space. In addition to live plants, you really need an air purifier/filter/ioniser and if possible also burn some tea tree & lavender oil in a suitable dispenser in between classes to benefit from its anti-microbial action. The lavender is also good for cleansing and helps soften the pungent anti-septic smell of the tea-tree.



➤ **Healing Directions**

The directions of the East and Southeast are particularly important for a yoga centre because they are wood energy which relates to tendons and natural health. As you can see from the image here the East is specifically associated with the Feet/Legs and the Southeast with the Back and Spine. The Southeast is also a particularly powerful wealth direction, so you would ideally have this as the front door or at least keep it free of clutter.

LATER HEAVEN SEQUENCE





Plants & Natural Views

Round leaved real houseplants are ideal in a yoga space for cleansing the air but also providing an important view of natural greenery. If you have the climate that permits opening the doors onto a Zen garden or a beautiful view of nature, then do so, because this will only augment the sense of tranquility gained from the yoga practice. This is scientifically proven - views onto greenery or even houseplants are proven to calm the heartbeat and reduce anxiety. Fascinatingly, even fake plants have a similarly calming effect though not as pronounced.



Chinese Horoscope

A little known fact is that Feng Shui takes into consideration the time and date of birth of a business owner when choosing the best property to buy or lease or create from scratch, as certain directions resonate more with certain dates of birth.

If you rent a public space for your classes, you might not have the permission or the time to implement all of the tips but for those who work in a dedicated yoga centre I hope you will be able to create an even more enjoyable space. I'd be happy to have a complimentary discovery call session to explore further how bespoke advice could help your next yoga or wellbeing centre to thrive and be the ideal healing space. Namaste!



Sarah McAllister is a globetrotting Feng Shui master, author, speaker and Chinese astrology consultant and founder of London based design consultancy Feng Shui Agency Ltd. Since 1998 she has advised individuals, families and companies all over the world how to apply the technicalities of classical feng shui to their homes, new builds and commercial offices or leisure projects. During her City career she was a part-time Shiatsu therapist before moving fully into Feng Shui consulting. Her training is in both intuitive and classical style Feng Shui & Chinese astrology and also in Environmental Psychology and Wilderness Spirit Philosophy. She is a Thought Leader for the Global Wellness Institute and sits on their Wellness Architecture Initiative – a world class professional group researching the impact of architectural design upon the spiritual, physical and emotional health of occupants. Her passion is consulting for ecoluxe regenerative new builds and wellness centres/spas &

commercial resorts in stunning natural settings. Sarah provides talks and roundtable expertise the world over for design & property authorities like DECO, RIBA, Savills, AIA and St Joost. Her trailblazing Feng Shui Interior Design portfolio work has been featured in Abode 2, LuxLife and Cotswold Living and she is a regular media commentator for publications like Mansion Global, HouseBeautiful, Hia, Red Magazine, MailOnline, The Times, Guardian, Metro and London Evening Standard. She has appeared live on TV (BBC Global and Morning Extra) and live Radio (BBC Radio London, TalkRadio, TalkSport, ShareRadio, EC1FM) and is fortunate to have provided Feng Shui consultation for organisations such as Princes Foundation for Building Community, Red Bull, Oxford University St Hugh's College, Westminster City Council, Bartercard, SalterBaxter (Publicis) and many other large and small businesses globally.

When not busy with feng shui she enjoys wilderness trekking, gentle chi kung and flying trapeze! Contact her via www.fengshuiagency.com/contact or call 0844 848 4099 (UK callers only).

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