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Feng Shui Offers Conscious Ecological Design

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In recent years, there has been substantial growth in various fields concerned with environmental and human-friendly building design. Practices such as green architecture, sustainable building, environmental psychology, building biology and feng shui are parts of this general movement that could be called conscious ecological design, the need for which has never been more urgent. Feng shui has always been concerned with ecology and living in harmony with nature so, in essence, it always has been “green.” And while green architects and builders fill the modern need for more environmentally efficient buildings, feng shui deals with the more human side of creating healthy and supportive environments.

These days, many people consider using feng shui, but mostly for existing buildings and only after they already have moved into a new space. Most associate it with interior decorating, such as furniture and art placement, selecting accessories and choosing colors. To a feng shui expert, decorating actually is the last layer with which to work.

The assessment starts from analyzing the quality of the land, because the land itself is what offers the most support to the building and its occupants. Feng shui, which originated in rural China several thousand years ago, primarily was used for the purpose of site planning and site development. Finding a good site for a village and planning out the placement of

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buildings and fields was critical to the survival and well being of the people. In modern times, feng shui has developed a large number of techniques for both rural and urban site development. Those techniques can be applied at the level of city planning and scaled down to subdivisions and single buildings. Just as with green construction, starting a new building with the correct feng shui fundamentals is important to its long-term success and viability.

Assessment of the land may include the study of topography, water patterns, traffic movements and quality of vegetation. Carefully analyze the location of existing structures and buildings on the site and their influence on the building under consideration. In addition to such visible components, an expert would be able to access more subtle aspects, such as the flow of vital energy throughout a site. Based on the results of the analysis experts can predict the potential of a site to support the success of a business.

If a building has good feng shui, the business will function more efficiently, job satisfaction and harmony between employees will improve, and the growth of the company will increase.

On the other hand, you may have heard that some buildings have a reputation, such as that every business that moves there fails within a few years. In feng shui, it is a commonly held belief that some buildings or sites are sick. In the more extreme cases, no matter how good and green the renovation construction is, it will be like pouring water into sand. The building will not be able to hold vital energy and support its occupants. Depending on the diagnosis, feng shui can offer solutions and ways to cure a site or a building and alleviate the problems before and during a green renovation.

Maintaining Balance

What makes a good feng shui site for a business? Some principles are similar to

those for residences and some are specific to businesses. As with a house, the land behind the building should be either slightly raised or, in a commercial area, have a slightly taller building behind, but not in front of, the one you are considering. The space in front of the building should be open with a well-defined entrance. While a house that is too close to a highway or busy street will have difficulty collecting and containing energy, in the case of a business it might mean more activity and visibility. Similarly, while the site at an intersection or crossroad will be too stressful for a home, it brings more visibility and opportunity to a business. Yet, there is fine line between the advantage of visibility and the ability to collect energy and maintain balance at a specific site: if energy moves too fast and the building is not large or strong enough, it will result in stress and a draining of energy.

In addition to land assessment, feng shui deals with the impact of building orientation. A good feng shui design always has been a good solar design. Whereas green architecture concentrates on choosing the most effective solar energy materials and their best placement, feng shui analyzes subtle energy differences of different compass directions and utilizes their impact in the building orientation and placement of the rooms within the building to enhance the potential for success and wellbeing.

Feng shui principles are deeply rooted in the observation of nature and the relationship between people and the environment. Therefore, it carefully considers what kind of activities will be performed in the building and how to best support the goals of those who occupy it. Feng shui uses an understanding of the differences in energetic properties of space within a building to create the best layout that will promote success and growth of the business. Clarity of layout and good flow will contribute to creating a

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healthy and balanced environment. Non-toxic and natural materials, specific colors, shapes and natural objects such as plants, rocks and water features, are substantial components in creating supportive places to work.

More and more people are coming to realize that their living and work environments not only affect performance and efficiency,

but directly impact health and well-being. Feng shui offers many powerful techniques for creating balanced and healthy environments that complement other areas of the green movement. Its importance is starting to be recognized by the architectural community. Jason Kliwinsky, the director of sustainable design and operations for the Prisco Group, a professional service firm based in Hopewell, N.J., has initiated an ef-

fort to add feng shui to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), the green-building rating system. With careful assessment of a site and consideration for all of the components that create a healthy building, we can make a difference in our own lives and for future generations by creating environments that are beautiful, ecologically sound and supportive to our well-being. ■