

lesson 1

what is feng shui?

Feng Shui Explained • How Feng Shui Works • Varieties of Feng Shui • Feng Shui in This Book

Feng shui is an ancient discipline of Chinese origin that shows us how to develop and shape our living and working spaces to best serve our emotional and spiritual needs. Its theories come from centuries of experimentation and tradition; its philosophies draw from Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and, in modern times, from disciplines as diverse as anthropology, psychology, and geology as the following table shows.

FENG SHUI'S INFLUENCES

INFLUENCE	CONTRIBUTION
<i>From ancient Chinese culture</i>	Symbolism, ritual, mythic animals
<i>From Taoism</i>	Balance of elements/energies
<i>From Confucianism</i>	Human interaction with the universe
<i>From Buddhism</i>	Intuition, meditation
<i>From the New Age movement</i>	Crystals, aromatherapy
<i>From modern psychology</i>	Effect of color on mood, powers of the subconscious
<i>From anthropology</i>	Adapting feng shui to other traditions
<i>From geology</i>	Interaction of environmental features

2 Lesson 1

Feng shui (pronounced fung shway) recognizes that our environment plays a crucial role in our well-being, and it seeks to help us both maximize our environment's benefits and minimize the detriments through the careful selection and arrangement of the elements present in it. The goal of feng shui is to influence the effect our environment has on our attitudes, our moods, our health, and our destiny.

Feng shui recognizes that attitude and intention are more like directions of travel than static states of being. Set off on a positive note in the morning, and you'll find it's easier to maintain that upbeat mood. When your mood is good, you naturally attract good people and things to you, which in turn further elevate your mood.

Let's say you want to improve your financial picture. A traditional feng shui remedy for stagnant finances directs you to place several shiny coins on a red cloth in an area of your home that is naturally conducive to thoughts of money. The abundant pile of bright coins triggers associations with prosperity, and the vibrant red cloth works as an intensifier. Red is a universal color of importance: Its presence tells us "pay attention!" Whether we realize it or not, this display of coins on cloth is sending our brains a message. Consciously or unconsciously, we begin to turn more of our energies toward our finances.

Feng shui is:

A way of understanding the universe: Feng shui draws on a wealth of philosophies and cosmologies to explain the relationship of human beings to their immediate environment, and to the world at large.

A means of transformation: You can use feng shui to help you achieve your goals and improve any aspect of your life.

A way to subtly influence your life for the better: Maintaining good feng shui promotes peace, health, happiness, prosperity, and good relationships.

WHAT FENG SHUI CAN DO

Feng Shui teaches that the primary conduit for good fortune is beneficial *chi* (pronounced “chee”), the life energy that swirls around us and through us. When we arrange our environments and align our intentions to draw good chi to us, we naturally accumulate vibrant health, excellent luck, and positive attitudes. You can use Feng Shui to:

- Free up energy you’re currently wasting
- Focus more energy on important areas of your life
- Reduce stress
- Restore vigor and optimism
- Improve health (when added to proper diet, exercise, and lifestyle)
- Aid in goal attainment
- Enhance relationships
- Promote peace

Feng shui’s benefits naturally extend beyond you to influence the people in your life. As you cultivate your own cheerful, uplifting chi, you’re creating a gift you can give to every person you meet. You can infuse a room with your chi. Have you ever met someone with an effervescent presence who leaves you feeling energized whenever you’ve spent time with that individual? Or do you have a friend whose relaxed, calming demeanor has a soothing effect on your mood?

Your own presence in the world creates a ripple that reverberates throughout the universe—that’s why it’s so important that the energy you give off is positive.

Likewise, any space you create as a conduit for good chi becomes a boon to all who pass through it. Your family, friends, and visitors to your home will benefit from the healthy, peaceful, energizing environment you’ve created.

FENG SHUI CAN'T...	FENG SHUI CAN...
Make you win the lottery	Improve your finances
Land the lover of your dreams	Enhance your love life
Get you instantly promoted	Boost your career
Cure a severe illness	Promote better health
Help you harm someone	Help you help others

FENG SHUI: WIND AND WATER

Feng shui comes from the Chinese words for *wind* (the invisible chi carrier—you can't see it, but you can feel its effects) and *water* (the visible chi carrier—you can both see it and feel it). Together, wind and water make up most of the earth's ecosystem; their presence is necessary to circulate chi and sustain life.

Wind and water are the two most dynamic elements; their flowing motion is the same as that of chi. These two elements influence us more than any others—without water and air (wind) we cannot survive. Feng shui maintains that these two elements are the main carriers of chi. A healthy flow of both is necessary to bring life energy to homes, workplaces, and individuals. For example, it's generally considered auspicious to live near moving water, but if your home sits too close to a swiftly rushing river, the chaotic energy from this rapid flow may damage and disrupt the flow of energy in your home. A feng shui expert might advise you to build a wall, or plant a row of greenery, between your home and the river to deflect the potentially negative forces.

Chinese symbols for "wind" and "water."

BOTH A SCIENCE AND AN ART

Feng shui is the science of the interaction between human beings and their surroundings; it's also the art of living harmoniously with the environment.

As with any science, feng shui's principles have been developed through trial and error. Few sciences enjoy the wealth of data that feng shui has collected over the centuries since its inception.

Yet there is also an aesthetic, creative, and intuitive aspect to feng shui. Feng shui seeks to beautify, because beauty is necessary for the proper nurturing of the human spirit. And although it operates by strictly defined principles, there is usually room within those principles for self-expression and creativity. In situations where the rules are ambiguous, or where a number of solutions present themselves, some of the best decisions may be made on intuition alone.

Feng shui is *not* magic: Although it has ties to astrology and ancient mystical traditions, it is not in itself magical or superstitious. Feng shui deals with genuine, observable phenomena, like electromagnetic energy and the connection between mind and body, which modern science and Western culture have seldom explored. It also works on our subconscious minds, helping us condition our intentions.

FENG SHUI BRINGS US BACK TO NATURE

Feng shui recognizes that human beings began our existence in a natural setting. Until modern times, the vast majority of humankind lived outdoors. We were in tune with the natural rhythms of the earth, and we lived in intimate harmony with other living things. Today, we live most of our lives indoors, cut off from the energies and cycles that made us who we are. Although our new indoor existence meets our physical needs, it often neglects our emotional and spiritual ones.

Feng shui seeks to restore our connection to the natural flow of life by bringing into our artificial environments more of the natural energies that fed our outdoor-dwelling ancestors. It recognizes that nature is highly organized and flowing, and seldom uses straight lines. It brings these qualities into our homes in the way it focuses our belongings to buffer harsh lines and angles, and to channel the natural flow of energy.

SCHOOLS OF FENG SHUI

Feng shui is an ancient and complex discipline. Over the centuries it has enjoyed diverse cultural influences and branched into many forms. Modern feng shui in America can trace its origins to three main schools of thought:

Form feng shui: Developed during the Han Dynasty (206 BC–219 BC), this school of feng shui looks for protective influences in the shapes of surrounding landscapes and structures.

Form feng shui recognizes that the land around us is shaped primarily by wind and water, and the quality of the chi they carry. Each landform, whether rolling, green hills or sharp, craggy mountain peaks, gives off its own type of energy. Some arrangements of landforms are beneficial and protective; others produce harmful chi. Form feng shui helps us choose a good location for our homes, and can help us modify undesirable land elements in our present homes. It can also be applied indoors to the way we position our furnishings. Many schools of feng shui incorporate elements of the Form method into their traditions.

Compass-based feng shui: Developed in the Sung Dynasty (960 AD–1279 AD), this method uses an 8-point compass based on a numeric system with magnetic north as zero. Each direction has its own characteristics, energies, colors, shapes, and elements. Applying this compass to a home or office can reveal information about the pattern of energy that flows there. Individuals can then enhance their environments with the proper colors, shapes, and materials for each energy area. Compass forms of feng shui often overwhelm beginners—particularly those uncomfortable with mathematics—and as a result, they have not caught on as readily in the United States. Even in China, people often hire feng shui masters to help them interpret the complex system of numbers that affects their lives.

Black Sect, or “Black Hat” feng shui: This relatively new, Buddhist-inspired school of feng shui, originally from Tibet, uses relative positioning rather than compass directions to determine the specific areas of importance within a home.

Your home's layout is determined from your point of view as you stand at your front door. This method is the most popular in the United States.

FENG SHUI TODAY

Most modern feng shui is an aesthetic blend of many schools of thought, with diverse, multicultural influences. Feng shui has become so widespread in the United States within the past two decades that it has found its way into any number of diverse fields, and has had layers of new meanings and associations added to it. While feng shui has proven, by centuries of staying power, that it is flexible enough to merge with a wide variety of thought, it does have its own core system of rules; it's not simply "anything you want it to be." Throughout this book, we'll make references to modern applications of feng shui, but we'll steer you toward the principles that have endured the test of time.

In this book we'll place special emphasis on the Black Sect school, but we'll also mix and match popular forms of feng shui, and bring in the essence of traditions often associated with feng shui. The Black Sect school is currently the most popular form, and is probably the easiest one to put into practical use.

We encourage you to learn about all forms of feng shui, and to practice each to see which will be most helpful for you. But we urge you to experiment with only one form at a time. Although many of their teachings overlap, mixing and matching can cause a certain clashing of symbols, if you'll pardon the pun. Particularly if you try to do compass-based feng shui at the same time as the relative-position feng shui, you may find that your areas of concentration become muddled, and the results will be confused at best and harmful at worst. You'll get the best results if you remain clear in your intentions and focus on one school of thought at a time.



student experience

"When I first became interested in feng shui I tried taking a bit from one magazine article and another bit from a TV show. I was just really scattered, and I didn't get anything out of it. Once I invested my efforts in just one school of feng shui, I realized how much there was to feng shui and am now quite devoted."

—Bob, floral designer

FENG SHUI LESSON-END QUESTIONS

Lesson #1:

1. What attracts you to feng shui? What makes you want to learn more about it?

2. What are your personal goals for your work with feng shui? What do you hope to gain from practicing it?

3. What areas of your life need improvement? What do you believe feng shui can do to help you improve these areas?

Other Thoughts:
