

Courier Mail

Keep harmony in your home

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- From: AAP
- February 16, 2011 12:00AM

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HARMONY: Bamboo, stones and candles are positive elements in feng shui.

Source: The Courier-Mail

MEN take note: it's not only your wives and female flatmates who dictate you should shut the toilet lid, you've got a whole ancient culture against you.

And it's not just the toilet lid. The Chinese art of feng shui also says we should plug our sinks so positive energy in our homes doesn't escape down the drain.

It's all superstition, according to the Chinese Communist Party, which once banned the practice. But Jodi Brunner, president of the Sydney-based Association of Feng Shui Consultants, says it's a way of creating harmony between the environment and humans.

But don't think there is a list of simple rules to follow, feng shui is complicated.

Brunner says there are a number of different techniques to encourage qi (pronounced chee), that is positive energy, in our homes, workplaces and gardens.

"We can divide feng shui basically into two broad areas," says Brunner.

"The forms and shapes of the internal and external environment and then there's the formulas that we use to calculate the types of qi that we see in the environment."

If that sounds confusing think of feng shui consultants as people who assess the type and amount of qi or energy in a space and then calculate how to harness that energy.

Brunner says feng shui consultants pinpoint the location of the qi in the environment and work on ways to maximise that qi for benefit.

"The simplified way to look at it is that we can divide the house up into eight different areas and those eight different areas have different types of qi; there's different techniques in feng shui in how to divide up those areas and what those areas represent (health, career, wealth etc)."

For example, says Brunner, the most basic principle of feng shui is where to live in an environment. The Chinese believe that their home should be where there is a good supply of natural resources, such as water and mountains.

"In feng shui we say mountains take care of the people and water takes care of wealth," says Brunner.

"Water is a metaphor for yang energy just like mountain is a metaphor for yin energy. So when we talk about water, then the front of our house is where the water is located. It doesn't have to be real water it could be like an open space for instance which we would sort of classify as virtual water."

The Association of Feng Shui Consultants, which has more than 150 members nationwide, believes in traditional feng shui as opposed to more modern approaches.

Those who follow traditional techniques believe that feng shui in the home changes just as people change. Brunner says the changes occur in 20-year cycles.

"Depending on when a house was built, we'll certainly know a lot already about the feng shui but it also has to depend on which direction the house is facing as well," she explains.

The direction of the house and the cycle in which it was built determine the formula for feng shui, and the forms in the surrounding environment are believed to say a lot about whether the feng shui is good or not.

For instance, Brunner says, a mountain at the back of the home acts as protection, while water at the front of the home allows the qi to flow through the rooms.

If the area around the front door is too dark then there's no vision for the future for yourself, Brunner adds.

She says the belief that drains should be plugged and toilet lids shut depends on what area of the house the drain is located. The same goes for other feng shui beliefs, which can include the arrangement of furniture, plants and artwork.

There is no one set of rules.

When it comes to Chinese New Year, which is based on the Chinese lunar calendar, Brunner says there are rules we must follow.

She says prior to New Year's Day it's good to finish jobs, and clean the home, windows and doors so good qi can enter.

New Year's Day should be spent relaxing because it sets the mood for the following year.

Brunner, who became a master of feng shui in 2005, has a tip for the Year of the Rabbit:

"The one area that we have to look out for is the east of our home ... in that area of the house be careful not to do any digging or renovation or disturbing otherwise it could bring bad luck."

FENG SHUI TIPS:

Encourage energy in your home, workplace or garden.

- Plants add oxygen and purify the air, so they are good for a living room, but not good in the bedroom, because at night they remove oxygen.
- Arrange furniture to face the door because you never want to place yourself or a guest in a vulnerable state. If you can't see what's coming, that translates to not being able to see what's ahead in your life.
- You need something beautiful, like art, for your eyes to rest on when you enter the doorway. It gives you something to look forward to when you walk into each room.
- In the kitchen, keep the hotplates clean and make sure every one is working. Each hotplate or burner is an avenue of prosperity into your life. It's good to place a small mirror behind the stove to double the number of burners.
- The toilet lid should always be closed because you don't want prosperity to go down the drain. But don't nag - people yelling at other people in the house to keep the lid down is very bad feng shui.
- Some people put stoppers in every sink hole. The energy of the bathroom is all about exiting the house. The pipes slope down away from the home, which is good for a room of elimination, but not good for qi.
- A master bedroom is not good feng shui. A small bedroom is considered better than a large one. There should also be nothing under the bed, so the qi flows under and over the body.
- TVs in the bedroom are not good. Everything in the bedroom should be about you and your beloved. Anything else you bring in there prevents you from getting the full benefit of the relationship.
- A king-size bed is bad, because there are two box springs, so there is literally a separation under the mattress. But you don't have to get rid of your furniture, instead you can put a red sheet between the box springs and the mattress, because red is a powerful colour that can overcome the divide.