

DESIGN MATTERS



REVERSAL OF LUCK

PLANTING red flowers in her front garden helped turn Linda Kho's life around. As an Australian-born Chinese woman, Kho was familiar with feng shui, but a rough patch after moving house prompted her to investigate it further.

She hired consultant Jane Langof, who made some subtle suggestions to protect Kho from negative energy. These included painting the front foyer red, installing a water feature in the backyard, adding some lucky charms and planting the flowers.

Kho (far left, with baby Samantha and Langof) says she found her relationship with her neighbours improved – as did her marriage. Another suggestion, to move Kho's older daughter to another room, resulted in a happier toddler.

"I didn't embrace feng shui wholeheartedly, without any questions," she says.

"I don't see feng shui as just placing lucky bamboo and everything will all be all right.

"It is about what that lucky bamboo means to me and how it can help me."

Picture: Frank Viola

We're picking up good vibrations

Even real estate agents are turning to feng shui, writes **Katrina Creer**.

COULD a mirror in the front entry, or a vase of dried flowers, really turn off potential buyers?

Sceptics won't think so, but real estate experts know better. It's bad feng shui and that can lose a sale.

The ancient Chinese art, they've learned, has a place when it comes to selling property in Australia. The 3000-year-old science, which creates a balance of energy in a given space and promotes good health and fortune, is growing in popularity, and not just with Asian families.

Feng shui consultants say demand for their services has increased since the global financial crisis hit. Vendors are using the design principles to present their homes for a quick sale. Feng shui is also used during renovations or building in a bid to bring prosperity.

Agent John McGrath describes the practice as "common sense" and says his agency has used feng shui when trying to sell a difficult property.

"A lot of it is about clearing and creating a better energy in a property and I think that can help," McGrath says.

"If nothing else, it creates a fresh approach and brings some focus to the property."

Feng shui looks at the energy flow, or Qi (pronounced chee), in rooms and gardens. It is about balancing opposites and using five main elements – water, fire, wood, metal and earth.

Some consultants use a Chinese compass, or *luo pan*, to recommend changes within the

home. Horoscopes are often worked out to determine a person's life pattern and the direction that will bring them the best fortune.

Recommendations for feng shui are usually low-cost, such as rearranging furniture or moving items in a room.

Angus Kell, general manager of Archicentre NSW & ACT, says that while feng shui may seem complicated, it shares many of the basic principles of good design. These include not opening a house straight on to a footpath, as well as focusing on ventilation and natural light.

"If I were designing a house in an area with a high proportion of Asian buyers, I would definitely incorporate feng shui into the design," Kell says.

An investment in suburbs such as Eastwood, Chatswood and Ashfield could pay dividends, he suggests.

Developers Dyldam used feng shui principles when building the Lotus apartments in Carlingford.

Two of three blocks were designed under the guidance of feng shui expert Gayle Atherton.

The project proved to be one of Dyldam's best sellers, with almost a third of the apartments sold within six weeks of being launched in February last year.

"It was a happy coincidence that we could develop a feng shui site at Carlingford, which has a strong Asian demographic, and provide that niche market with a contemporary harmonious apartment," says Adam Searle,

Dyldam's sales manager.

Every aspect of the two blocks, from their orientation, floor plan and interior decoration, was mapped out to maximise the flow of Qi.

Steve Martin, president of the Real Estate Institute of NSW says while feng shui can't be quantified in terms of added dollars, it definitely increases a home's saleability.

Albury-based Martin says the feng shui trend is not confined to big cities.

"I have had buyers walk into a home and, because the feng shui is wrong, it has been a very short inspection," he says.

"Conversely, I have had other people inspect a property with good feng shui and it has made them feel very comfortable."

Holistic architect and feng shui specialist Anthony Ashmore has helped numerous vendors give their property new energy, particularly during the economic downturn.

He says one Paddington home, which had lingered on the market for a year, sold two weeks after a basic feng shui reworking.

Another consultant, Jane Langof, says most of her clients are non-Asian, keen to turn around their fortunes.

The most common mistake she sees is the presentation of the front of the property.

Not having a visible house number is bad feng shui, as is flaking paint on your front door.

"If the place is cluttered, looks messy and is not maintained, it distracts from bringing positive energy and opportunities into your life," Langof says.

As a general rule, mirrors should not be used in entry ways because they reflect good energy away from the home. Neither should you be able to see the back door from the front, otherwise the energy can go straight through the house.

A cheap remedy is to hang a chandelier or decorative light in a hallway to slow down the Qi.

Mirrors are also a big no-no in the bedroom as they are thought to amplify unresolved problems between couples.

Langof warns against filling homes with Asian items, like Buddha statues, saying they often just look silly.

"And putting a three-legged money frog by your front door is not going to make you a millionaire," she says. "Feng shui alone is not going to give you everything you want – you also need to make changes to improve your life."



Go for growth: Lucky canes are used to channel good forces into the home

POSITIVE ENERGY

- Keep the front of your home inviting to attract opportunities.
- Don't place a mirror opposite your front entrance as this reflects energy and opportunities out the door.
- Don't fill your home with tacky lucky objects. They should only be properly implemented and should blend with your decor.
- Dried flowers are considered bad feng shui. Use fresh ones to lift the energy in your home.
- Open doors and windows to bring fresh air into your home.
- Declutter your home, particularly under the bed.
- A well-placed water feature is considered a powerful influence in feng shui.

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Natural: White and gold foliage symbolises earth and metal elements, which support money