

Ancient Design, Modern Times

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THE AMERICAN BUSINESS WORLD HAS caught on to what the Chinese have known for several thousand years – our physical surroundings affect the way we feel and function. In the past two decades, an increasing number of Tampa Bay businesses are turning to feng shui, the Chinese art of placement and design, to enhance their public and work spaces.

Feng shui (pronounced 'fung shway') translates as "wind and water," and is based on ancient principles of creating harmony and balance. Everyone has had the experience of entering a place that feels unusually soothing or tranquil ... or conversely, going into a space that evokes an edgy, uncomfortable feeling. The idea that creating a more positive physical environment can result in happier customers, more productive employees and an improved bottom line has begun to resonate with the for-profit sector.

The practice of feng shui originated in the Chinese agrarian culture, where people used their relationship with nature to determine how and where they situated their houses and farms. A mountain at their back would protect them from wind and enemies; and water flowing toward them would provide nourishment.

Interest in feng shui eventually spread to the royal class, where the principles determined the design and location of palaces and ceremonial burial grounds. Beijing's Forbidden City, home to emperors for five centuries, illustrates feng shui influences in the physical design of the buildings, gardens, gates and towers and the way in which they are positioned within the overall complex.

Feng shui practitioner Carol Cannon, owner of Corporate Creatives in Dunedin (www.corporatecreatives.com), has applied the principles to spaces ranging from a warehouse to the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* publishing offices. The common denominator among her diverse client base is that "they all want their employees to feel good when they're at work."

Practitioners employ a variety of strategies to create aesthetic balance in a building, a room, a cubicle, or even on a desk. Techniques include eliminating clutter; creating clearly marked, welcoming entryways; placing furniture strategically; adding plants, art, mirrors, and water elements; and using color to evoke different feelings.

Will Spates, president of Indoor Environmental Technolo-

Using feng shui principles in workplace settings feels good to customers, the staff and the bottom line.

gies Inc., an environmental testing and consulting firm, explains how feng shui enhances his staff's productivity. Cannon chose a non-distracting pale green for the offices in which his inspectors write reports; pale yellow to put people at ease in the conference room; and in the high-activity lab, white walls with pictures of buildings that represent the company's work. "Being a scientist, I look for proof of what works," says Spates. "And Carol's process definitely made a difference."



FEEL THIS A Reading etc. shop in West Palm Beach incorporates feng shui principles applied by Dunedin's Corporate Creatives.

In office settings no one – from the CEO to the data entry clerk – should sit with his or her back to the door, says Janice Hunt, founder of Feng Shui USA Inc. (www.fengshuiusa.com) in Tampa. "Successful executives' desks always face the door. It's a proven fact that in areas where many people share a space, the person who sits facing away from the door is in the position that has the highest rate of turnover."

In some businesses, attracting customers is also important. For Susan Huff, owner of Integrity Organic Restaurant in St. Petersburg (www.integrityorganic.com), Cannon arranged plants outside the door to draw people in; added a fountain to the patio; and placed a display unit in the middle of the small restaurant so that people would look at each counter and shelf.

Huff knows that if the restaurant doesn't feel right, it will affect business; and she is quick to explain how she measures the "success" of feng shui. "Seventy-eighty percent of all

“ The person who sits facing away from the (office) door is in the position that has the highest rate of turnover. ” – Janice Hunt of Feng Shui USA Inc.

restaurants fail in the first year, and for those that don't, it typically takes two years to show a profit. We've been fully open a little over a year and we turned a profit in our second month.”

Similarly, Corinne Weiss, owner of Inner Creations Inc., a Tampa interior design firm, attributes a significant increase in business to Hunt's work on her 3,600-square-foot space. “Business increased dramatically within two weeks after Janice was here,” says Weiss. “I can't attribute it to anything else because ... I don't advertise ... and I didn't do anything differently.”

Christy Giallourakis, owner of the Center for Oriental Medicine in Tarpon Springs, says client feedback tells her that feng shui is “working” in her facility. “We have many people who come in for an appointment and immediately say, ‘It feels so wonderful here. Can I just sit for a while?’”

To people who can't reconcile hard business practices with

Corporate Creatives



something “mystical,” Hunt says, “the people who build successful businesses are the shrewd and savvy ones who are willing to think outside the box, and leave no stone unturned.”

Companies that have implemented feng shui elements include Hyatt Hotels, British Airways and Citibank.

Flora Liston, owner of Nicholas Michael Salon in Palm Harbor, readily attributes an improved bottom line to the feng shui makeover she applied soon after she bought the business. Beforehand, the retail products sat on glass shelves in the front window. Cannon suggested a move to a more accessible area of the salon. “We

had an immediate 300-percent increase in sales,” Liston says.

Giallourakis suggests that feng shui skeptics simply test it out. “As a business owner, you need everything in your favor that you can possibly get, so why not try it?” she says. “Seeing (and experiencing) is believing.”

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