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ON THE HOUSE

Feng shui should be felt, not seen

Sunday, July 19, 2009 3:47 AM

BY JIM WEIKER

Diana Garber labored for weeks applying the Chinese design principles of feng shui to a Parade of Homes house in Dublin.

She hopes no one notices.

"A lot of people think feng shui is putting a wind chime here and a coat of paint there, but it really is about everything," said Garber, who was hired to enhance the interior of the Dani Homes model, one of 11 homes in the annual showcase.

"People shouldn't walk in and say, 'Oh, you did feng shui.' No, it shouldn't be like that. It should be transparent."

Still, it might be easier to explain what feng shui isn't than what it is.

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese way of maximizing positive energy. Its practitioners rely on a compass, diagrams, a series of math formulas and a recognition of five elements (water, fire, earth, wood and metal) to achieve harmony in rooms and homes -- harmony that, they think, can lead to success in life.

"The key is energy," said Garber, who runs Intuitive Concepts out of her Sunbury home. "You want it surrounding you, not blocking you. When you change the energy, you really do change the future."

But the devil, as usual, lies in the details: How, exactly, are the principles applied in a house?

Garber walked me through the Dani home to point out examples of feng shui in practice:



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Diana Garber sought to maximize the positive energy at this Parade of Homes house through feng shui design principles.



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- The fountain on the rear patio bubbles up instead of away from the house, because water flowing away drains energy and money from the home.
- The fireplace contains round stones in a round bowl to balance the energy coming from the straight stainless-steel mantel.
- Flat, dark panels in the entrance and master bedroom are decorated with wavy reeds to provide liquid energy.
- In the master bedroom, a mother-and-daughter sculpture occupies the southwestern corner -- the corner that represents the female head of the household.
- A large curved sofa dominates the media room to balance the straight lines of the credenza, woodwork and television.
- In the study, Dani Homes' awards sit in the northeastern corner -- the corner of knowledge and honor

Dani Homes built one of 11 houses in the Parade of Homes.

At Garber's request, even the asking price of the house was changed from \$849,000 to \$849,230 so the latter's figures would add up to 26, or 2+6, equaling eight -- the number that represents prosperity.

Garber knows that people are skeptical.

"Oh, I run into that all the time," she said with a hint of resignation. "Particularly in the Midwest, there's still a lot of 'Oh, that's against my religion' sort of thing."

She knows that proving the effectiveness of feng shui would be difficult. To a degree, it is itself like a religion -- and comes down to faith.

Still, she has seen more than enough to persuade her that feng shui is real.

She firmly believes it helped her recover from personal tragedies and helped send cancer into remission in some patients she worked with as a consultant for Ohio State University Medical Center.

"I don't use the word *cure*; that's up to God," she said. "Feng shui just shifts the energy."

Garber, 57, can talk the elusive language of feng shui all day, but she is no candle-sniffing cloud-watcher. The former vice president of information technology at Bank One is well-acquainted with the world of hard numbers and facts.

She has little use for America's pop commercialization of feng shui, with tchotchkes such as ceramic "money frogs" that can be bought at Best Buy.

"Oh, some people believe 'Let's put a money frog next to the door to bring in money,' " she said. "Oh, come on; if it were that simple, everyone would do it."

Garber's corporate background might have helped prepare her for the rigors of home building.

"She is more accommodating, more compromising," said Nilay Bhatt, the Dani Homes owner who hired Garber.

Bhatt is confident that Garber improved his house, even though her improvements might not be immediately recognizable.

And that, of course, is fine with Garber.

"I hope the people who think they know what feng shui is say, 'Oh, I don't see any feng shui here,' " she said.

"And for everyone else, I hope they simply experience it."

Reporter Jim Weiker writes on home topics. You can reach him at 614-461-5513.

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