

Worried sellers turn to old idea

BY MARY AMOROSO -- SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Feng shui (pronounced fung schway and translated as "wind and water") originated in China thousands of years ago. It is based on the premise that energy (chi) -- from the earth, from construction, from prior residents and guests, from current residents' emotions, and from the home design and placement of objects -- can affect the comfort level and pleasantness of a home.

The ancient Asian art is being employed by some despairing homeowners in this current market downturn, as well as by developers of some major North Jersey projects. Developers along North Jersey's Gold Coast have used feng shui experts to provide input throughout the design process.

Bill Rosato, president of Tarragon Development Corp. in New York, said his company used feng shui principles in its One Hudson Park project in Edgewater and Trio buildings in Palisades Park.

"When you design around those principles, it's supposed to create a more pleasant environment," he said. "I think it was very successful. Even if one doesn't believe in those principles, designing around them does make for a better environment for living."

Alex Stark, a Brooklyn-based architect and feng shui consultant who worked with Tarragon, said, "I set out to maximize opportunity for family life, health, good relationships and prosperity. The basic idea in feng shui is that if you can balance these requirements for any space, then the likelihood of success is improved for everybody, including the sales component."

With One Hudson Park, Stark first looked at the orientation of the building. It had river views (good for prosperity), but it was too close to the road (a negative influence). In addition, the front entry was originally facing south. East-west-north-south orientation is a big deal in feng shui, and entry to a home or building is the focus of much attention. Stark persuaded the developers to re-orient the entry to the north with the entry path going through a small park. (Greenery and natural materials are another feng shui plus.)

With each individual condominium unit, Stark sought a clear separation between the bedrooms and the more public living and dining areas. He recommended keeping the kitchens as separate as possible from the entry.

"Kitchens too close or in view of front doors can create stress and are associated in feng shui with illnesses related to nutrition and digestion," he said.

He recommended placing beds away from walls containing plumbing and avoiding the visibility of toilets from the bed, since that, he said, can be bad for bladder and reproductive health.

"Feng shui also likes to avoid sharp corners [from walls or hanging beams] pointing at beds, dining tables or kitchens," Stark said. "Known as poisoned arrows, these are associated in feng shui with illness, vulnerability and stress."

In another example of this trend, Savanna Partners called on feng shui consultant Teresa Polanco Marinelli's expertise as the developer converted 201 apartments at Peninsula at City Place in Edgewater to condominiums.

"It was a little more difficult for us because we were restricted to the existing envelope of the building," said Jamie Anthony, project manager for Savanna Partners. "We used natural materials in the upgrade of the kitchens and the baths. We knocked out walls in the kitchens to make them walk-in kitchens and keep the flow consistent. In the new community lounge, we put a partition in the middle so that the flow goes around and creates a circular path for traffic."

Anthony added: "I don't really understand feng shui, but if you compare 'before' and 'after' pictures of the units, it's pretty phenomenal."

Both Rosato of Tarragon and Anthony of Savanna Partners said their companies do not use feng shui for all their projects. On the Gold Coast, it's a marketing tool to reach what they see as a target audience.

"A large majority of our buyers are Asian," Rosato said. "At the point of sale, they indicated that one of the reasons they looked at the buildings and bought was because of feng shui."

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Feng shui consultant Alex Stark (third from right) at ground breaking ceremony for One Hudson Park in Edgewater, NJ.



Feng shui expert Teresa Polanco Marinelli suggesting improvements to seller Joe Bonano. She advised on the conversion of 201 apartments at Peninsula at City Place in Edgewater