

Feng Shui

The ancient Chinese practice of feng shui has long been revered as a means of attracting wealth, health, love and luck. **Liz Ledden** and **Qudy Xu** meet two Phnom Penh based masters to find out about its role in the capital's businesses and homes.

UNEARTHED GRAVES AND building ruins in China reveal that feng shui dates back thousands of years. Consisting of aligning buildings, rooms and objects to correspond with certain areas of one's life, feng shui is linked to astronomy. Often simplified and repackaged for the masses, feng shui these days is known in the west, and is certainly widely used amongst Chinese and other Asian populations.

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HARMONY AND BALANCE

“Feng shui is not about superstition, it's about harmony and balance,” says feng shui expert Ashley Young. She explains that it “aligns energy”, and that if a well-designed place doesn't have a good feeling, it could all be down to its feng shui.

A Chinese-Khmer Australian, Ashley practices feng shui in Phnom Penh as a sideline business, though it is also a personal passion and hobby. “I've always been interested in metaphysics, and was influenced by a fortune teller that lived next door to my house when I was around thirteen,” she says.

Over time, Ashley became disillusioned with the idea of pursuing a career in the area, particularly after witnessing some fraudulent practices in Hong Kong and Cambodia.

A chance meeting with a Malaysian feng shui master restored her faith in the subject. “A ten-minute consultation turned into an hour which turned into a six-year relationship,” she says. Ashley's teacher and mentor Albert Ee is famous in Malaysia, she says, where he's provided feng shui consultations for clients including Air Asia and Estee



Lauder. To become a feng shui practitioner “you have to have an affinity with it,” she says. Her teacher could read her potential in her hands.

RISING FROM THE DEAD

Fifty-eight-year-old Zhan Han Long is another Phnom Penh based feng shui master, who became a believer after a spate of bad luck in his life. “I nearly died nine times,” says the former soldier. He claims that a coffin was prepared for him on two occasions, yet each time he miraculously recovered. He also established five different businesses that failed.

Starting to wonder why some people had luck and success, while others continually didn't, he turned to feng shui to look

for answers. Since 1982, he's been practicing feng shui in the capital, based out of a modest home brightened with a display of kitsch and colourful Chinese pictures and photographs.

Han Long says that Khmers “100% believe” in feng shui, explaining Chinese-Khmer business people in particular are devotees, looking to ensure success through careful consultation with a feng shui master.

The CDC Bank building close to Wat Phnom is a prime example of a Phnom Penh building with excellent feng shui, according to him. What makes it a good building, he explains, is having water – the Tonle Sap – to the left, Norodom Boulevard to the right, and Wat Phnom behind it. Having a tall building to the rear

means money will be trapped and will blow down to the next tallest building, according to Han Long.

Other key advice he gives is to not place a ladder, well, big tree, kitchen or toilet in the centre of the house. For a small family a two-room house is lucky, and for large families, six rooms is the optimum number. Houses numbered 3, 4, 13 or 14 should be avoided if possible and will be “messy”, he adds.

Han Long provides advice over the phone, in his office, or will visit someone's home for a consultation. Fees range depending on the wealth of the client and scope of the job. Sometimes clients pay him an amount equating to their lucky number. His clientele is 10 percent western, however as he speaks Mandarin and Khmer, they usually require a translator.

WESTERN CLIENTS

In Cambodia, Ashley says there is a “huge belief” in feng shui, though most of her own clients are from Phnom Penh's western community. She has performed consultations for Topaz and K West restaurants among other businesses, and for people's homes as well.

“My service is more practical and westernised,” says Ashley. “I give people more explanation about the reasons behind my advice than others do”. She explains that she likes to equip her clients with the knowledge to do their own feng shui in future, so they're not dependent on her for future consulting.

The most popular areas Phnom Penh's residents request help with when designing or decorating their buildings, says Ashley, are “definitely romance and money.” And who couldn't do with a bit of help when it comes to these.

Ashley Young
Tel: 012 442 119

Zhan Han Long
163 Street 146, Tel: 011 874 000



Zhan Han:

Nearly died nine times before he turned to feng shui