

*Spa Design*

# How Eco-friendly



*part 1*

# is Your Spa?

by lyn falk

Does your spa environment nourish you, your employees and your customers on mental, emotional, physical and spiritual levels? Does your space contain enough natural materials to resonate well with your biorhythms and life energy?

Most people spend up to 90% of their time indoors. Unfortunately, for the most part, Mother Nature has been notably absent from modern-day buildings. The use of plastic laminates, synthetic fabrics, toxic glues and strong cleaning chemicals in these structures with marginally effective ventilation has contributed to unhealthy and essentially lifeless spaces. With few aspects of nature present, such environments are incapable of reflecting nurturing energy back into the surroundings. Ultimately, mental, emotional and physical states are affected negatively.

At one point or another, everyone has enjoyed time spent in a constructed atmosphere that feels good naturally—a space that beckons inward and soothes the soul. There also are those environments that immediately convey a sense of unease, or the perception that something is amiss. If the body's impulses to seek out a space that works in harmony aren't addressed, the results of extended and repeated periods of time spent in such a detrimental place can lead to chronic health problems and even disease.

## Vibrant, balanced and rhythmic

Every constructed environment is made up of a multitude of elements and principles of design that work synergistically to create energy patterns that affect the senses on both subliminal and overt levels. All of these components are present in Mother Nature, which intrinsically strives for balance. When structured environments reflect nature, they naturally and positively affect the mind, body and spirit.

Elements such as color, shape, texture and lighting, and principles such as proportion, repetition, contrast and composition all possess energetic frequencies that affect us emotionally and physically. However, when too many of these elements are utilized together or combined haphazardly, a sense of disharmony results. With the correct use of design tools, the energies of the space become balanced, and the body responds positively. The following

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list can help you to analyze and determine the effectiveness of the design of your spa environment.

**Aroma and odor.** Spas are full of good aromas and toxic odors. Essential oils provide wonderful fragrances that can influence a client's mood and health, but cleaning materials often override these effects and toxify the air. If you recently remodeled or brought in new furnishings, are they expelling toxins, such as formaldehyde? Are cleaning materials adding toxins to the air? How is the ventilation system dispersing airborne toxins?

**Artificial light.** Is there a comfortable mix of lighting sources? Too much fluorescent light can cause headaches and fatigue, and may contribute to stress. Full-spectrum lights and incandescents are better options.

**Color and texture.** How do the colors and textures make you feel? Are they calming, invigorating and interesting? Most

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importantly, do they enhance the intended activity of the space? Each hue has its own vibration—wavelengths of energy that hit the pupils, which, in turn, signal the brain to react. Warm shades, such as red, orange and yellow, produce vibrations that stimulate. Cool colors, such as green, blue and purple, elicit vibrations that are relaxing.



**Composition and balance.** Is there a “style” to the environment? Is a quiet theme evident, or are too many stories creating confusion? Is a sense of symmetry necessary to evoke a soothing mood, or is an asymmetrical layout appropriate for creating a level of energy? Keep colors, shapes and finishes in balance with one another. Avoid too much of the same thing.

**Contrast—negative versus positive space.** Is there enough contrast between color, texture, lighting and the three-dimensional objects to make the area interesting without becoming distracting? Are there places for the eyes—and thus the mind—to rest?

**Layout and rhythm—the placement of three-dimensional objects.** Is there a natural rhythm to the space? Does energy flow freely in, around and throughout? Is there a natural path to follow? Do the feet comfortably follow the eyes? Strategically placed focal points, such as a brightly colored piece of art on an opposite wall, will draw clients in and through your spa effortlessly.

**Movement.** Is there movement within the environment? Is it so still that it doesn’t feel alive or vibrant? Is a fan needed to circulate stale air? Would a colorful mobile add energy to a stagnant corner?

**Natural elements.** It’s important to surround yourself with organic materials whenever possible. Real wood, wool, silk, cork, organic cotton and bamboo are all wonderful finishes that add to the inherent rhythm of a space. Plants can help to clean toxic air and have been shown to relieve stress when looked at for short periods of time. An aquarium full of lively fish is another wonderful way to bring natural movement and positive energy to a room.

**Natural light.** Does your spa receive any natural light? If so, does it feel like the right amount? Too many windows can bring in too much energy, just as too few can make a room feel stifling. Studies have shown that balanced natural light can improve an individual’s mood and productivity.

## Design Tools (Based on the laws of nature)

Elements of Design	Principles of Design	Six Senses
color	contrast	sight
form	direction	sound
line	dominance	smell
point	illumination (dark/light)	taste
shape	movement	touch
size	positive/negative space	intuition (or the sixth sense)
texture	proportion	
weight	repetition	
	symmetry	

**Sound.** Acoustics are extremely important in a spa. Although they are social places, spa rooms need to provide quiet and privacy. Does your facility encourage conversation or discourage it? Does it echo or absorb sound? Does the music playing add to the ambiance and please your clientele? What kind of noises permeate the space?

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**Spatial proportion.** Is the ceiling height in pleasing proportion to the length and width of the space? Is the furniture the proper size for the dimensions of the surroundings? Do the door and window openings bring balance, and allow for good air and light circulation? A well-laid-out floor plan can make a real difference in how traffic flows and clients interact within your spa.

**Taste.** Taste is one of the six senses that never should be ignored. Are you "breaking bread" with your clientele? Offering a beverage or snack can go a long way toward keeping a waiting client happy. And, when thinking of food, consider nutrition—beauty and nutrition are linked closely.

## What's the fuss?

Feng shui, a descendant of vastu design, originated 5,000 years ago in India and is based on the immutable and universal laws of nature. It was passed from India via the Himalayas into China, where the Chinese integrated it into their culture.

Feng shui is based on science, art and Chinese folk philosophy. Its value lies in learning how to incorporate the optimal conditions to achieve balance, in keeping with the universal laws of nature. Feng shui acknowledges and manipulates the yin—the receptive, passive and inviting aspects of quiet reflection, and yang—the productive and interactive aspects of an environment. The yin is represented by angular objects and shapes, dark colors, rough textures, nighttime, and obscure and quiet qualities. The yang is symbolized through circular objects, light colors, smooth surfaces, natural light and stimulating energy. Yin and yang always are present and dependent on one another. The proportions of each can change and fluctuate but never can be separated.

Feng shui strives to bring balance and harmony to a constructed environment; the same balance and harmony that are found in nature. Feng represents the subtle effects of a room: things of which you may or may not be aware, but which, over time, can erode the health of the mind, body and spirit. For instance, if entering a room requires walking around a wall or partition, it may not appear to be obstructive at first. But, after repeated incidences of diverting around the object, a person's energy field slowly will begin to build its own wall to protect itself, thus creating an energy block. Over time, this can exert a negative impact on the activity taking place in that space.

Shui represents the overt, obvious effects of a room: things that are noticed immediately upon entering. For example, a piece of furniture that blocks a natural pathway is an undeniable problem. After a short period of time, its presence will become annoying enough that the obstacle will have to be removed.

In addition, feng shui addresses seven primary elements that should be balanced proportionately within a healthy, productive environment.

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| • Animal | Life        |
| • Earth  | Grounding   |
| • Fire   | Invigorate  |
| • Metal  | Opportunity |
| • Water  | Clarity     |
| • Wind   | Lightness   |
| • Wood   | Growth      |



## Integrating balance

Integrating feng shui and the design tools detailed in this article (see **Design Tools**) can help you to provide a more positive environment that calms and relaxes your clientele.

Part 2 of this topic will appear in the December 2005 issue and will feature easy tips for counteracting negative elements, as well as simple ways to create a healthy, eco-friendly spa. ■