



Feng Shui Diagnostic to enhance Space and strengthen Health

Interview of Marie-Pierre Dillenseger

by Pascal Dreyer

October 2008

Responsible for the Feng Shui Research Center France, Marie-Pierre Dillenseger has been practicing and teaching Chinese disciplines related to time and space for the past decade. She uses classical Feng Shui as an additional tool to analyze work and living environments. She provides argued and insightful audits of places and moments i.e. timing and date selection. Member of Leroy Merlin Source's task force "Habitat sain" (Healthy living), she brings new perspectives on time and space interactions at play in professional and residential building, with strong focus on enhancing people's health.

Leroy Merlin Source (LMS): How did you get into Chinese classical Feng Shui, after working in French cultural institutions and in American IT companies?

Marie-Pierre Dillenseger: Chinese culture has always been part of my life. I was treated by acupuncture as a child. At age 17, I discovered and avidly read the *Book of changes* (or Yi Jing). This very old divination book offers a westerner a non linear view of the world. The irrational part of life and the erratic side of some events find their places in a global decoding of the world. You witness in this book Chinese powerful thinking deploy itself through meaningful analogies.

But to be perfectly honest, in spite of this proximity with Chinese culture, the first time I witnessed a Feng Shui audit, it was in the United States, and I told myself « These American are crazy ! » This was because the Chinese Master who performed the work proposed simple, almost trivial, recommendations. Once executed though, these changes had an impact. I wanted to learn more about it. In the early 90s nothing was available: no books, no training. By 1995, all I had read did not match what I had intuitively understood. Therefore I decided to go to the source of this very old knowledge.

LMS: So in parallel to your professional work, you started training with a Feng Shui Master, in exile in Toronto.

M-P Dillenseger: Master Joseph Yu, whose teaching I took, was born in 1944 in mainland China. He taught mathematics in Hong Kong. He is an honest and rational man who had decided his life path was about sorting out true from false information about Feng Shui. His goal was to save these disciplines discarded as superstition by the Cultural Revolution. His efforts were focused on redefining Feng Shui tradition with a mathematician eye. He also wished to pass the knowledge to Westerners to prevent its disappearance.

LMS: Feng Shui has often a bad reputation, between *new age attitude* and decoration techniques, actually carrying all types of superstition. Did you have doubts during your training?

M-P Dillenseger: Of course, the question about superstition was there and rightfully so. But I had experienced a tangible improvement in the place audited at the time. My initial motivation was actually to acquire new tools to effectively enhance performance at work. My objective was not so much about space issues, but more on optimizing the results of the projects I was managing at the time. I later realized that it was not possible to practice classical Feng Shui and ignore Chinese astrology! You actually need both skills to chart, compare and match the strength/weaknesses maps of a place and its “owners”. As a result, I embarked in learning Chinese traditional time assessment techniques. I had to come to term with my reluctance to believe in any sort of determinism and engage in what appeared quite esoteric. In the process I discovered the depth of my prejudice and powerful time - space assessment tools!

LMS: In Chinese thinking, project and location are not separate. What part does Feng Shui play?

M-P Dillenseger: Western tradition, and especially French philosophy since Descartes, heavily links the success of any undertaking to the individual behind it. We believe all is possible as a result of our mind and will power. In Chinese thinking, three factors contribute to the success of any given task: the individual factor (accounting for 20%), the spatial factor (30%) and the time factor (50%). The later includes the energy characteristics of the moment of birth. In some way, we are the deployment of that vital energy over the course of time.

As a result, it is important to form an alliance with the time factor, namely by personal awareness and ongoing development of our innate qualities (the ones we are born with). The role of the so called “astrology” is to provide a road map to our potentials. Our strengths are constantly maximized or impaired by the positions we take and by the places we choose to work or live in. We all know people who moved to a new home and found themselves weakened or suddenly unfocused without apparent reason for it. In such a case, the conjunction between individual factor / space factor / time factor is

simply not favorable. That same space could be great for someone else. I do not believe in fatality. But simply (!) in the need for thorough analysis of one's motivations and potentials and for space audits to align forces with objectives.

LMS: What are the types of requests you are getting and how do you respond to them?

M-P Dillenseger: First of all I do not do « comfort » audits, the type of demands such as “Is my flat Feng Shui?”! To eliminate the « false » requests, I try to understand the real motivations of the person. What is the problem or the objective? Is it really an issue related to the space element (moving in or out, planning an addition, building or renovating, etc)? If I understand things are actually fine, I just tell the person not to change anything. If the difficulty is not related to the space, I provide appropriate referrals. For example if someone complains about bad sleep and I found out that his or her mattress is over 15 years old, my first advice is to get a good bed. I never take the place of an architect, a doctor, a mattress specialist or even a therapist! This preliminary work, where I listen and filter the request, is very important as my expertise is subtle and quite implicating for the person.

LMS: You are currently working with health professionals (laboratory and health center). How do you perform a Feng Shui diagnostic of these work spaces?

M-P Dillenseger: The diagnostic is made in a very classic way: needs assessment, quote, site visit, diagnostic, recommendations, validation and follow up. I always start working ahead of the visit with the site, building and floor plans. This preliminary work is centered on analyzing the openings (windows and doors), the penetrating flows, the circulation paths, the internal cross roads (strategic points). I determine the center of gravity. It should ideally be located inside the building but end up sometimes being ex-centered due to repeated modifications to the building (additions, extensions, redesigning of the space, etc). This work “at the desk” gives way to a first audit of the subtle forces at play in the building. At the same time, I build the chart of the clients. This “captain of the ship” is either the owner, the head of the company or his/her closest associates responsible for the business results. For a family, I built the chart of every family member leaving under that roof.

LMS: Following this pre-work, what do you get from the visit?

M-P Dillenseger: First of all some discoveries! Sometimes, people give you a floor plan that does not match the space they live in. And they do not realize the gap between the territory they have emotionally invested in and the actual space they bought. The visit lasts half a day and calls for a strong collaboration with the client. I start by visiting the place with them and make compass readings. We then reflect on bridging the floor plan (potential) with the way the place is being used (reality). I am looking for “dead zone” or *non-lieu* in French. These are important as they tend to shrink the space available to us. I am talking about some storage areas, utility closets, unused rooms turned into junk

yards, etc. Old Chinese wisdom looks at living spaces as organisms with components prone to malfunctions, atrophy and even sickness. The unused areas, the damaged walls, leaking pipe and the closed dusty rooms carry a risk of infection that could spread to vital areas. Therefore, I always encourage clients to locate dead space and sort out papers, archives or whatever is piling up there. Oversized piece of furniture can also be problematic as they literally eat up breathing space.

Once the building chart is established (taking into account compass reading and surroundings), I do the audit and explain the interpretation with the people involved. This high level reading – with an eagle’s eye – allows clients to become fully aware of the true dimension of their space and its interactions with the outside. It calls for a strong link between space functions and personal goals. For each segment of the space, I analyze its impact in terms of health and work potential (key condition of prosperity) as well as its timing. I provide a priority list for matching the space identity and the occupant’s goals.



LMS: You say: « My goal is to bring the space to its full potential ». What does it entail for people asking for your help to reorganize a work space?

M-P Dillenseger: There are different steps, not all of them necessary. First of all matching the usage of each room with the functions they are supposed to host. Then advice related to the choice of materials, the enhancement of pathways, the allocation of colors and sometimes the overall shape of furniture. My audits are about balance and optimization of pre-existing potentials, not aesthetics. Based on my advice, my clients often hire an architect or a decorator.

LMS: You have collaborated on several construction projects, working closely with architects. How do you go about it?

M-P Dillenseger: My first intervention is related to the optimal positioning of the building on the selected site. According to the client's needs, I can work with the architect when the preliminary sketches are drawn, sharing key words from the charts of the people who will live or work in that space. These key words feed the creative process and often serve as save guards when choices are made. They also inform the selection of materials and forms most favorable to the person. There may be exterior constraints predefined by a local tradition. We then work towards finding the best compromise. Same with the placement of the building facing a certain view, that may not yield the best energy map. My role is to decode and explain the restrictions and to negotiate with the future occupant, the architect or the builder. I am the client's advocate.

When the project gets finalized, I identify the center of gravity. The challenge for the architect is often to produce a balanced form that is not square nor rectangular! My advice is to make sure the resulting floor plan does not yield a gravity center locked in a technical area (heating system, utility closet) nor in a trash area or garage! Attention paid to these details makes the final project go beyond what simple common sense would conceive. When the final project is validated by both the architect and me, I withdraw until it is time to lay down the foundations. This is to make sure there is no difference between the orientation indicated on the footprints and that of the real building.

The next important consideration is openings (windows, doors and even vents). They generate entering and exiting flows. People rarely visualize them before the building is completed and then it is too late to change. Their selection is essential to anchor the building while connecting it with the outside. I pay close attention to pathways, in particular the entryway, to ease the transitioning between two worlds of very different functions (work and home for example). Finally, like the building openings, thresholds are very important. I try to conceive seamless transitions using porch, hall, lobby and corridor elements. Westerners have gotten used to discontinuity and the brutality of ruptures in pathways. My job is to re-install continuity in many different ways.

LMS: Finally, French people ask for a lot of light. Some architects multiply window spaces. What do you think about this?

M-P Dillenseger: There is too much window surface in modern houses! This exposure to emptiness and light fosters internal instability: how to behave in a glass house? We need a fair balance between Yin energy, brought by solid, not transparent walls, and yang energy, brought by windows and doors. The recommendations and solutions I bring aim at placing people at home or in their work place in a position of strength. This is because homes are more than shelters or dead shells. They communicate a part of their energy to us. The places we live or work in are like energy battle fields. We have to

learn the *Art of War* to be able to win these battles. This is what my expertise is all about.

Glossary (Extracts from the www.powerspaces.com website)

By **time**, we refer to the year of a career change, the moment a property is bought or sold, the month a new product is launched, the day of a critical meeting, the time a partnership or engagement is formed, the moment construction or renovation start or simply the date of a move.

By **space**, we refer to any building, residential or commercial, business offices or industrial sites, a board room, an exhibition hall or any public area.

More on www.powerspaces.com