



ECOCHI:

DESIGNING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

BY DEBRA DUNEIER
CERTIFIED FENG SHUI MASTER PRACTITIONER
ECO-DESIGNER / LEED® GREEN ASSOCIATE

CHAPTER 1





How EcoChi Found Me

EVERY SPACE has a life of its own, and subliminally affects us as we go about our lives. Our moods, energy, actions and thoughts are all profoundly influenced by our surroundings. The design, color scheme, textures, light, furnishings, accessories and placement of each item impacts our senses from moment to moment, and influences how we feel about ourselves and others. This is true whether we are at home, at work, or in public spaces or other places, including hotels, spas, theatres, hospitals, offices, restaurants and museums.

I created the EcoChiSM system first and foremost because I needed it in my own life. It is more than design. It's a lifestyle shift that carefully blends the powerful ancient and modern truths and lessons of Classical Feng Shui, Green and Sustainable Living, and Environmental Psychology to revolutionize how people feel in their spaces. By bringing nature's elements indoors and utilizing these forces in a whole new way, EcoChi attracts prosperity, harmony, health and happiness—while simultaneously propagating environmental integrity.

How can I illustrate the effectiveness of this revolutionary, multidimensional system and lifestyle shift? How can I show you that it actually works? Certainly each of the elements, the “ingredients” of EcoChi, has in fact been scientifically studied. As has been known for thousands of years, Feng Shui works. The benefits of green living, for the individual and for the world at large, are well documented. And environmental psychology is a respected discipline with a strong practical application. But what of my “secret recipe”? What's unique about EcoChi, and how do I apply these disciplines together in a way that offers you an infinitely more transformative result?

My intention, in the pages and chapters ahead, is to answer these questions and to share with you, with complete honesty and candor, how EcoChi worked in my own life and in the lives of people with whom I subsequently worked, people who generously shared their stories with me. Identifying names or other such characteristics had to be changed to keep their privacy intact. But their stories are true, and the results, were, if anything, even more remarkable than I can adequately convey.

I personally have traveled down a rough road, but it was all worthwhile, since it brought me to where I am today. Looking back, the trip to now has been both intriguing and life altering. Thanks to the totality of my experiences, joyful in some parts and painful in others, but always illuminating, I have arrived at this wonderful place where I am able to show you how you too can open new doors to new rooms that will advance you professionally while also bringing greater joy to you in all aspects of your personal life.

And not just *your* life but also the lives of others: those who live with you, or visit you; those who spend time in work spaces you provide; those who spend leisure time in public spaces you create, and those who you hope will buy or rent the spaces you develop, build or design. EcoChi is an equal opportunity transformational system.

Of course I did not just wake up one day and suddenly know everything I am about to tell you. It was a gradual process, one that began, as many such life-changing journeys often do, when my world fell apart.





My world falls apart...

After the dot.com crash, my successful 17-year-old online corporate gift basket business was just about wiped out. One day the Internet was sending us orders in the hundreds, the next day there were almost none. I had two small factories, and closed the larger of the two. I cut back on payroll by cutting hours back and letting go of non-essential employees. I canceled any back orders with my suppliers. The business was in critical condition.

On September 11th, 2001, the terrorist attack in New York, of unthinkable proportions, took our loved ones before their time, rocked our souls and left our emotions raw. In its aftermath, Debra Hope Creations, Inc. also took its last breath.

During this time I went to Chinatown to visit a Chinese Master for acupuncture. I had a frozen shoulder and was trying to avert surgery through alternative medicine. Acupuncture was my first choice. As I lay on the table, he tried to move my arm over my head. It would not budge. The first thing the Master asked me was, "Where are you stuck in your life?"

Where *wasn't* I stuck? After a marriage of 25 years, I was in the middle of a painful divorce, one I did not see coming and certainly did not want. My son was away at college and my daughter was about to leave for her first semester at George Washington University. I was going to be stuck in a 5,000-square-foot house, suffering from empty nest syndrome, in a town where I never felt I belonged. I was about to live alone, with only an angry standard poodle for company. To cap it off, my business was on a respirator. I was no longer a wife; no longer had my children home, and soon I would no longer be president of my own company. I was stuck everywhere!

As the Master strategically placed the needles in my skin I could feel the energy moving around the needles and around my body, but did not utter a word. The Master then said to me, "You have a gift." After few moments had passed he added, "Do not waste it." Then he walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

I had been married to my high school sweetheart three days after my 19th birthday. We built a highly successful fine jewelry manufacturing business together and had a close family life. Now my husband was gone, my children were away at school, and the packing was left to me. On a practical level, I was also overwhelmed by all of the "stuff" my family and I had accumulated in the twenty years we lived in the suburbs. After living in such a large house, how could I possibly fit my things and my children's things into a city apartment?

At the time, I did not know what I know now: that your home is a reflection of your life. If it is filled with clutter, there is no room for new and wonderful things to come into your life. Clear it out and you shift the energy. You can feel the difference almost immediately. In my case I started the process of de-cluttering with baby steps...one drawer and then one closet at a time. After all, the Chinese Master told me to find where I was stuck and to move on. So I did. Nonetheless, I felt rudderless, lost at sea, devastated. Having lost my business and my marriage at the same time, I didn't know who I was anymore. If I wasn't a wife or president of a company, who was I? Nobody, it seemed.

I was determined to attack my clutter in a methodical manner, so I created what I call the SMG system: "Stay, Maybe and Go!" I went shopping for large plastic containers of various sizes and labeled each clearly. I worked my way





through all my possessions, making three piles. If I hadn't used something in a year, it went in the "Go" pile. If I just loved it but didn't use it, it went into the "Maybe" pile. The things I was still using went into the "Stay" pile. I dumped, donated and packed. Over days and weeks, I was surprised how many things started to easily flow from the "Maybe" to the "Go" pile. If it was sentimental but something I had no room for in my new place, I found that if I took a photo of it I could more easily let it go. The longer I looked at various items, clothing, furniture, bric-a-brac, letters, and everything else we tend to accumulate in our daily lives, the more I realized I did not need them, and the all-important "Go" pile began to grow. It was a cleansing of the soul to toss the past and make room for the future!

Sadly, I knew that Bradley, my dog, would never be happy in a small apartment in the city, so, yes, he went into the "Go" pile too. A grateful family who lived right on Virginia Beach took him, and he too found a second life. With lots of room to run and play, Bradley was no longer angry, and, in fact, brought joy to this family, whose young mother was fighting cancer. Happily, I learned that a lot of the possessions I gave away likewise brought a measure of pleasure to others!

When I moved out, I was able to move on. The big surprise was that it was through this process that I learned who I am. Cutting those ties allowed me to explore the world in a new way. I followed my own path—not anyone else's—and this path led me to where I am today: living my life's purpose by helping others transform their spaces, and in that process, their very lives. This is what fuels me. The apartment I live in today was designed to support and encourage joy, and that is exactly what I got. It was not very long before a wonderful man came into my life, I reclaimed my emotional equilibrium, and I had a new career.

A strange new intuitive connection to others...

Just as the Chinese Master's needles had restored movement to my shoulder, my life too became unstuck. I had gotten my divorce, sold my house, moved into an apartment in Manhattan, closed my business, and became a real estate broker.

When the economic crisis hit and the real estate bubble burst in city after city in 2008, there I was in my new career as a real estate broker, specializing in Manhattan high-end residential sales. When I realized that my sales were off about 30% and still going down I decided to take a long hard look at the industry itself, factoring in the "salt on the wound" global financial difficulties of historic proportions that we were all facing.

During this time, with the luxury Manhattan real estate business tanking, I was invited to speak at an international business conference. They asked me to make a list of possible subjects for the presentation, and I sent a list of about 20 topics. "How to create your real estate team;" "How to choose your real estate attorney;" "How to prepare your property for sale;" and "Feng Shui" were all on the list. I actually knew very little about Feng Shui, and I am not sure why I put it on the list, but that was the topic that they chose! So I had to quickly bone up on the subject before the presentation.

After I spoke, a line of people formed, all wanting to speak with me one-on-one. As I spoke with each one, I felt something special happening. These were strangers, and yet they were not. Something had shifted inside me. There





was an intense personal connection with each and every person on that line. The topic was clearly one of great interest to them, and when they had their moment with me, it was like there was no one else in the room.

I came home to escalating bad news about the real estate market. While I took pride in my entrepreneurial spirit as a decisive person who was able to constantly solve problems, switch gears, adapt and create, I also knew I had to act fast and be resilient in order to stay ahead of the curve. I had a lot of work ahead of me to be in the right place once the recession was over.

Since business was down, I had more time on my hands, which I knew was an opportunity. Thinking back on the reception my presentation had engendered, I decided to study with a Feng Shui Master. As it turned out, the one I chose was one of the three people who brought Feng Shui to the U.S. from China in the 60's. As I studied with him, and expanded my knowledge of "living spaces" overall, I kept remembering the unusual jolt of connectivity I felt with each person at that conference who had asked me about Feng Shui. Something wonderful was definitely bubbling up inside me, but I was not yet completely sure of what that something was. What I did know, with full certainty, was that I was determined to walk down this new path and see where it would take me.

It actually took me seven years to find my gift. It was a process of self-discovery, combined with extensive and intensive study of both the ancient and the modern. Most of all it required being open to whatever the universe had in mind.

Interestingly, at this point in time I feel as though I am standing on a key "acupuncture point" in the universe and a turning point in our earth's history. My hope, in creating EcoChiSM, is that it has the power and possibility, if utilized by each of us and enough of us, to serve as one of the "needles" that can bring back the vital resurgence of positive energy we so urgently need— in our spaces...and in our lives.

Debra Duneier



INFO@LIVINGHOMEBYDEBRA.COM

