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Order in the House

Create Harmony The Feng Shui Way

QUIZ:

What Your Clutter Reveals About You





Order in the House

BY INDRANI SEN

BRING HARMONY INTO YOUR HOME THE FENG SHUI WAY.

Laura Benko-Ceriello is something of an expert when it comes to clutter. Physical clutter. Mental clutter. Clutter caused by a need for abundance. Fear-of-success clutter. Just-in-case clutter. Clutter hidden away behind closet doors. Clutter as a distraction from larger issues. Sentimental clutter that chains you to the past. Clutter as a retreat.

Whatever category your clutter falls into, however, Benko-Ceriello, a 34-year-old feng shui practitioner based in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, has the same advice — let it go.

Feng shui, the ancient Chinese practice of arranging living space, offers some practical advice on how to do this. With the aim of allowing the free flow of “chi,” the life force believed to be within and around us, feng shui is based on the continuous changes in nature and in us, Benko-Ceriello says.

Cleanse your space, unclutter your mind

Whether you live in a studio in Manhattan or a McMansion in Brookville or a two-family in Bellerose; whether home is a walkup in Williamsburg or a high ranch in Wading River or a co-op in Rego Park, now is a great time to assess your living space and your relationship to it, Benko-Ceriello says. “Begin by doing a

deep clean of upholstery, to get new sheets, new bedding. It’s a good time to repair any items in your home. You never want to be surrounded by broken items, leaky faucets, wobbly doorknobs.”

Cleaning windows, painting and arranging seasonal fresh flowers makes sense. “With feng shui, you really want to bring in nature and balance all the forces of nature in your environment.”

Clutter cutters

More importantly, however, it’s the time to get rid of that clutter. Throw out anything broken, unused or forgotten, Benko-Ceriello suggests. Give clothes or toys away to friends and charities, or have a yard sale.

“If you’re holding onto something and what it brings out is guilt, like, ‘Oh, this was bequeathed to me by my great-aunt and it doesn’t go with my furniture, but I can’t let it go,’” Benko-Ceriello said, “let it go.”

Still, she said, clearing out should be done thoughtfully.

“There’s no reason why you need to get rid of everything and live a Zen-like existence with just a bed and a desk. But surround yourself with things you love. Surround yourself with the things you use. Anything you haven’t used in the last year, get rid of it. That’s always a good rule of thumb.”

A feng shui epiphany

At Benko-Ceriello’s own home, a small, street-level one-bedroom apartment, where she lives with her firefighter husband, John Ceriello, the need to keep clutter to a minimum is obvious — there simply isn’t room for it. Despite the close quarters, however, large mirrors, warm lighting and an enormous couch upholstered in white cotton create a feeling of comfort and enough space to stretch out.

On an overcast morning last week, Benko-Ceriello showed off her organized walk-in closet, vertical files and an array of round baskets of various sizes in which she stores business cards, gifts, paperwork and knickknacks. The bedroom cannot be set up so that the bed faces the door, as it should according to feng shui tradition, but a mirror that reflects the door and can be seen from the bed provides a second-best alternative.

“No home is feng shui perfect,” she said. “There’s always going to be things structurally that you’re limited by. It’s about making the most of your home.”

That’s what Benko-Ceriello helped Diana Gaffy and her husband, Sheldon Simon, do in their studio

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It's important to surround yourself with things you love. ERIC ROTH

Order in the House

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apartment last spring. The changes she suggested were small but made sense, Graffy said — changing the direction of the bed, fixing leaky faucets and windows that wouldn't stay up, placing a momento of the couple's love in the "relationship" area of the apartment, which happened to be the bathroom.

"It was very interesting, and we did have some noticeable changes after she did that," Graffy said. Simon, who runs his pet supply company from home, saw a surge in business.

For 53-year-old Alex Garfield, space was less of a problem because he lives in the top three stories of a Manhattan brownstone. A self-proclaimed "fashionista" who has started several national clothing labels, Garfield is following Benko-Ceriello's suggestions throughout his home.

Making changes

Because he is trying to meet a woman to settle down with, she suggested that he make room for her by clearing out his closets. She pointed out that many objects in the house were single, such as a shell and a wooden statue of a bear, and suggested that he have more pieces in couples. "She said, if a woman came into this home, even unconsciously, she'd think there wasn't room for her." ■

To learn more about Laura Benko's approach to feng shui, visit www.benkofengshui.com.



Clean out your closets to let positive new energy flow into your life.

PHILIP CLAYTON-THOMPSON.

What Your Clutter Says About You

There are many reasons why we hang on to clutter. Laura Benko-Ceriello offers a glimpse into the psychology of clutter and how it affects our lives as well as some solutions for dealing with it all.

A NEED FOR ABUNDANCE

SYMPTOMS: Buying and storing in bulk; cooking in mass; feeling guilty if you waste or throw things out.

SOLUTIONS: Give everything a home. It's OK to have stuff, but try to keep it in organized locations.

UNCLEAR GOALS, PRIORITIES

SYMPTOMS: Taking on too much; feeling scattered; bouncing from one thing to another; accumulating things you don't use.

SOLUTIONS: Narrow things down. Create a system that suits your way of living and thinking so you'll stick with it.

FEAR OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE

SYMPTOMS: Using disorganization to hold yourself back; making excuses rather than taking baby steps forward.

SOLUTIONS: Allow yourself to exceed your own expectations—start with small tasks with realistic goals.

A NEED TO RETREAT

SYMPTOMS: Using clutter to provide insulation and a feeling of safety.

SOLUTIONS: Give yourself a lift. Start with a room you love and keep only what you absolutely love.

FEAR OF LOSING CREATIVITY

SYMPTOMS: Believing that chaotic, disorganized surroundings enhance creativity.

SOLUTIONS: Remember that being organized releases rather than constricts creativity.

A NEED FOR DISTRACTION

SYMPTOMS: Creating chaos to ignore larger underlying issues; avoiding things you'd rather not face or deal with.

SOLUTIONS: Take quiet time for yourself, and focus on what you've been neglecting. Reward yourself for noticing.

SENTIMENTAL ATTACHMENTS

SYMPTOMS: Holding on to the past; not letting go of objects that no longer serve you and that you may not even like.

SOLUTIONS: Offer furniture and family mementoes to relatives who may appreciate or need them more than you. If you don't like it, give it to someone who does.

PERFECTIONIST TENDENCIES

SYMPTOMS: Having unfinished projects; thinking nothing is ever good enough; needing to control.

SOLUTIONS: Let others help. Start with a small project and follow through to completion.

"JUST-IN-CASE" CLUTTER

SYMPTOMS: Holding on to things in case you might need them in the future.

SOLUTIONS: Trust that the universe will provide for you. If you need that item again, trust that it will come to you in some way.