

Feng shui the modern way

A TikTok-famous interiors master says the ancient Chinese practice can boost your happiness — and even your love life. By Katrina Burroughs

“Once you feel good in your space, your whole outlook will change,” says Cliff Tan, the London architect who has translated the traditional Chinese practice of feng shui for the TikTok generation.

@dearmodern, as he is known to his 1.5 million followers, says: “To me feng shui is second nature. It’s making the home welcoming and comfortable. Feng shui is the logic I fall back on.”

Feng shui, literally “the way of wind and water”, refers to the ideal location and orientation for the perfect city: close to a river, shielded by hills and high up, away from floods. It’s a set of 3,000-year-old guidelines for design. In modern times feng shui is about optimising your environment for happiness and success. While Tan explains yin and yang, ba gua and chi in his book, his detailed floorplans illustrate practical solutions to the common challenges of contemporary homes: an awkwardly shaped bedroom, a compact kitchen.

Born in Singapore and living in a flat on the top floor of a high-rise in Clerkenwell, central London, Tan, 34, claims that improving the layout of your home can unlock everything from productivity to a successful love life. His grandfather was a prominent feng shui practitioner and his parents used its



Cliff Tan has made thousands of fans by showing how you can optimise your space for success — or just get organised

principles in his childhood home, although, Tan remembers, “the house was facing west, and had a very strong evening sun, which worked very well for my dad but worked badly for me”.

“I always apply feng shui to all my buildings, but never explicitly,” he says. “In Singapore and Hong Kong and most of East Asia, it is part of life. Because I practise in London, I never say too much about feng shui. I’m afraid it might scare clients away.”

Since the pandemic, however, a new generation of home improver is avid to hear more. Hundreds of mid-twenties to mid-thirties clients have asked for feng shui tips for their living

spaces since Tan started offering TikTok tutorials on where to position a bed, how to furnish a tiny room or where to place a console in a narrow hallway.

He made his TikTok debut at the end of 2020. “I was in Singapore travelling and we had to do a two-week quarantine in a hotel. I was watching TikTok to entertain myself and I wanted to contribute something. Being an architect, I thought of feng shui.” His account caught the imaginations of a global audience — like him, stuck indoors, bored and frustrated — and follower numbers soon soared. His book was commissioned in February 2021.

“Since then my whole business model changed,” he



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says. “I’m no longer doing things the old-fashioned way. I’m meeting people, like a GP, and solving their problems. People who are renting a home or want help with a single room wouldn’t normally consider an architect, but I’ve suddenly become approachable to them. It’s so nice. I give them a one-hour, two-hour slot, and I really talk to them and get into their life.” You can book an appointment with him, starting at £70 for a session, at dearmodern.com.

Tan’s online clients are a diverse bunch, scattered across the globe, but “every single one seems to have a bookshelf called

Kallax from Ikea”. So what do they want to know? “Some ask if they can design to attract a mate. The bed position is important. If you place your bed centrally, with bedside table and lamps, it shows balance and that you are ready to welcome someone into your life. If you have it like this, it reminds you every day that this spot next to me needs to be filled. The person won’t just come — but it reminds you to go looking for the person.”

His flat, where he moved to in 2016, was his first project after qualifying as an architect, and demonstrates the way feng shui can enhance a compact space.

He changed the layout in his east-facing kitchen to open plan, and took out the eye-level cabinets for a more spacious feel. He added rounded furniture “to promote the flow around the space”. A round glass coffee table reflects the light and the views, and plants placed close to the window energise the interior. “This one is quite spiky and represents high energy. You don’t want that kind of thing in the bedroom,” he says.

Feng Shui Modern by Cliff Tan, illustrated by Dura Lee, is published by Bloomsbury; £12.99 ■

