

A Home in Balance

by Gail Goldberger

Philosophies abound about how to achieve balance in the home, and myriad consultants and designers espouse various cures. We wonder: Should we burn sage or hang crystals? Place a fountain in the living room or flowers in the vestibule?

Wading through these theories can be daunting, as there are so many things to consider. But take heart: some universal themes emerge. Most experts agree that the rooms in your home should have function and flow, and that these qualities contribute to balance.

What are function and flow? Consider these questions. Do rooms serve their purposes? Can you accomplish what you need to accomplish in them? Does energy flow in them, or do they feel stagnant?

Most problems relating to function and flow can be addressed in three ways: de-cluttering, organizing and compartmentalizing.

“Clutter creates chaos, and chaos creates imbalance,” says Paula O’Connell of Environmentally Sustainable Designs. Rooms overflowing with things that have outlived their purpose, or projects that will never be completed, produce a deadening effect. Clutter takes up light and space, gets in the way of purpose and defeats energy and flow.

Aim for clean lines and an open feeling. “It isn’t always easy to get rid of things that are no longer needed, or take up too much space, because we are emotionally attached to them,” O’Connell notes. “If the task proves too difficult, ask someone more objective, like a friend or consultant, to step in and help. They can provide a viewpoint and impetus for us to let go of what we have trouble parting with.”

Organization also contributes to function and flow. Organization allows ease of access and retrieval, which cuts

down on stress and aids time-management. We can find a sock or a sweater, a pen or notebook, a knife or roasting pan, or our keys, without wasting time, creating a mess or driving our roommates or spouses crazy. These days, there are hundreds of organizing tools to help manage the “stuff” that gets out of control, such as handy drawer, shelf and closet dividers, plus attractive storage bins and boxes.

“Compartmentalizing sections of the home helps people stay focused and facilitates expression,” says Lenore Weiss Baigelman, founding partner of Full Circle Architects. For example, does a student need space to study or does an at-home worker have an office or private place to concentrate? “In addition to a dining room and living room, is there a window seat for reading, or a smaller area for more personal discussions between a parent and child, or husband and wife?” Baigelman asks.

Rooms don’t necessarily accommodate multiple functions, such as eating and business, though people often assume they do. Having space for specific purposes provides benefits over and above function and flow. It helps people balance their energies by separating work and play, family time and individual time, dining and relaxation.



Beyond function and flow are other aspects of design—such as scale, light, color, type and placement of objects—that affect balance. Rooms feel in balance when objects and furniture are scaled to size. Smaller rooms feel better with furniture that is smaller in scale, while spacious rooms best accommodate larger pieces of furniture.

“Light is critical, and the last thing people consider,” according to Karen Kalmek of GreenHome Chicago. Most people need light, she says, and if they can’t get it naturally, they should create it using lamps, color and fabric. Most people also need a balance of calm and stimulation, though this can be very individualized. “Know yourself!” Kalmek says. She personally likes a room with visual stimulation, she adds, but admits that such a look might be stressful for someone else.

Apart from scale and light, balance is often achieved by blending opposites. The Chinese system of *feng shui* recognizes two types of energy: yang, or masculine energy, and yin, or feminine energy. Because of the growing use of technology and electronic equipment, we live in homes with more yang energy. Smooth, steel surfaces and straight lines can be balanced with textures, such as

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—Paula O’Connell

fabrics and textiles, or art, all of which is considered yin energy. This also can be understood as balancing hard with soft, and cool with warm.

Laurie Pawli, of The Feng Shui School of Chicago, takes balance a step further and suggests that all five elements—fire, water, earth, metal and wood—be present in your home. Pawli explains that if it's not possible to bring in the actual element itself, it will work to use a picture of the element, or incorporate the color of the element into your rooms.

Kalmek sums up the theory this way: "Balance can't be put into a box. There is no one right way. Go inside yourself, quiet down and think, what do you want in your life, where do you feel peaceful or in balance? How do you feel in your home?"

If you know your space does not work for you and you just are not sure where to start, take advantage of architects, designers or consultants who can make suggestions and guide you in ways you might not consider on your own.

Resources:

Paula O'Connell ASID Allied – Environmentally Sustainable Designs, Inc., 847-404-7766, Paula@EnvironmentallySustainableDesigns.com, EnvironmentallySustainableDesigns.com. See ad in the Community Resource Guide.

Lenore Weiss Baigelman, AIA, LEED-AP – Full Circle Architects, LLC. 847-564-0884, FullCircleArchitects.com. See ad in the Community Resource Guide.

Karen Kalmek, artist and founder – Green Home Chicago (GHC) Design Center. 312-432-9400. GHCDesignCenter.com.

Laurie Pawli, Certified Feng Shui Consultant – The Feng Shui School of Chicago. 630-279-8870. LauriePawli@Comcast.net. CreateTheFeeling.com. See ad in the Community Resource Guide.

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The Yin and Yang of Winter

by Laurie Pawli

Stillness. Quiet. Going within.

As we drove up to Minneapolis the sky was blue and the crispness of winter was in the air. It was a peaceful, uneventful drive. Shortly after reaching our destination, the snow began to fall. And fall. And continued to fall until 20 inches accumulated. Each moment reflected the softness of winter as each snowflake gently floated to connect with the white covering already on the ground. Looking out the window, I felt as if we were in a giant snow globe with snow clinging to each branch, tree and home. The beauty in the tranquility of the moment was mirrored in the stillness that I felt inside. It was a meditative moment of silence. The True Yin of Winter.

Force. Sound. Energy.

Within a few hours, the wind started howling, and the snow began to swirl to whiteout conditions. The sound of the snowplows, snow blowers, and shovels on the pavement created a harsh contrast from the solace of the morning. The laughter of children echoed through the crackling cold air as they hopped on their sleds and jumped in Mother Nature's white carpet. Active energy resumed in the Yang of Winter.

Throughout the winter months, notice the Yin and the Yang in your life and the feeling they create in you. Each is a benefit. Each brings its own voice, the quiet energy of stillness or the vibrant energy of sound.