

# The Retail Recipe For Great Feng Shui

By Terah Kathryn Collins

On a recent visit to a new gift shop in town, I passed a woman who was just leaving with a big shopping bag in hand. “This place has great Feng Shui,” she beamed. My curiosity piqued, I asked her, “What exactly do you mean by great Feng Shui?” “Oh, you’ll feel it right away,” she said, smiling over her shoulder. “It’s the whole atmosphere.” And indeed, the store did have a very inviting atmosphere. Inviting enough for me to buy something so I could take a little piece of that great Feng Shui home with me...

So what exactly is “great Feng Shui?” As an Essential Feng Shui consultant for over fifteen years, I liken it to the favorite meal you create with just the right ingredients. When you know the recipe, you can make magic happen – in this case, an enchantingly irresistible retail atmosphere.

The recipe begins with three fundamental ingredients, or the three foundational principles of Essential Feng Shui:

1. ***Everything is Alive*** – Essential Feng Shui observes that all things are essentially alive with the thoughts and feelings we associate with them. Every *thing* triggers internal dialog, memories, and associations. The trick is to create a shopping environment that prompts the chatter inside shoppers’ heads to say things like, “I really love the lighting in here; oh, I love that color; this reminds me of being on vacation, what a soft chair...” Not, “I look awful in this lighting; what an ugly color; that looks like my kid’s messy room; there’s nowhere to sit in this place...” Creating an environment that encourages feel-good mind-talk is a gift - a gift that shoppers purchase and take home with them. Instinctively, they know that every time they look at their purchase, the pleasing memory of their experience in your store will come alive again.

2. ***Everything is Connected*** – Essential Feng Shui views all parts of an environment as connected. For storeowners this means that areas such as the ‘employees only’ bathroom, the storeroom, and the back office are just as connected to the store’s success as the showroom. Whether it can be seen from the front entrance or not, clutter and disorder can push prosperity right out the door. Every square inch counts and it’s all connected (see the Essential Feng Shui Grid below). What’s more, your personal connection with your business is crucial. The more you really love and feel connected to it, the more you’re ready, willing, and able to pour your essence into it, and to address clutter and maintenance issues as they arise. This principle also applies to your connection with every customer who

walks through your door. Serving customers with the “just right” balance between harassing and ignoring them is the holy grail of customer service. People respond best to soft landings, where no one barks a pseudo-cheery “Hello!” at them as soon as they enter the store and yet they can connect with someone helpful when they’re ready.

3. ***Everything is Changing*** – Essential Feng Shui regards change as a dynamically positive force in the world. Change causes customers to buy new things to keep their lives fresh and interesting. In fact, if we weren’t in some way compelled to change, very few products would be purchased. Ideally, your store embodies the excitement and the promise of change. As your merchandise changes, new things intermingle with existing stock and something new is always being highlighted. Customers stop by just to see (and buy) what’s new, even if it’s only new because you changed its location or presentation.

Great Feng Shui honors and satisfies the instinctual needs for safety, comfort, beauty, and positive change. An irresistible atmosphere begins at your front door where first impressions are saying “Yes” or “No” to potential customers. Your task is to create an especially welcoming front entrance area so the impression is always “Yes.” The following mistakes, commonly made by storeowners, tend to elicit a “No” response and push customers away before they can enter the store:

- Tall display shelves located near the front entrance. Instinct says, “Danger, I can’t see what’s behind that abrupt rise.”
- Too much merchandise arranged around the entrance. Even when it’s attractive, instinct warns, “Too much stimulation, I can’t take all this in right now.”
- Shelves, counters, or furniture with sharp corners that point directly toward the front entrance. Instinct says, “Danger, there’s an arrow pointed right at me!”

Here’s where you can employ some classic Feng Shui. Visualize the front entrance area of your store as the floor of a valley. About eight feet inside the door, the first low “hill” or display rises. Designed to be the “greeter,” it’s decidedly welcoming and communicates complete safety and allure. This could be a table or area that includes soft detailing such as fabric, upholstered items, plants, or flowers that *do not* block the view into the store. Ideally, there are two pathways around it that are four or five feet wide so that two customers can walk side by side or pass each other with ease. The various displays then rise incrementally higher as they

move back into the store. This “command view over rising hills” from the front entrance, as well as the ease of passage into the store, is very compelling to shoppers as they instinctively respond to the inviting landscape of your store. Add to this a display area that’s especially attractive in the center of the store, and shoppers are drawn in to explore the heart of the space. High shelves and other displays can act as beauty marks and define the outer boundary around the perimeter of the store. In larger stores, they can be used to embellish and define sub-areas within the space. The point is to create a commanding and very inviting view into the store wide from the front entrance.

Often, in an effort to make the store more attractive, too many things are displayed near the door. Think of this area as offering customers a delicious taste of what’s to come. Rather than piles of things, make it an inspiring place to rest the eye, a montage of possibilities, a collection of juicy tidbits that hint of the feast inside. Multiples of these items can be sprinkled around the store and the treasure hunt begins. Include representations of all five elements (see below) to you’re your displays especially tantalizing.

One of the most common Feng Shui faux pax is the “rude pointing” of sharp corners on furniture and displays, especially toward the front entrance. Like a finger pointing emphatically to “leave this instant,” sharp corners direct people *out* and *away* from your store! Choose store furnishings with rounded lines, or reposition offending corners and camouflage them with attractive plants, fabric, or displays of merchandise.

Along with the interior landscape, lighting is crucial in creating great Feng Shui. Your store could be perfectly arranged, and under florescent lights lose its soul. The harsh glare of florescent lighting diminishes the beauty of your merchandise and your customers alike. Though big stores such as grocery and drug stores usually don’t bother with creating much atmosphere, pools of incandescent and/or energy efficient halogen lighting can be incorporated to enhance the shopping experience as high-end groceries have discovered. Attractive florescent-free lighting causes people to relax and linger in the space. They make multiple purchases because they take the time to browse. Your store is like a beauty queen – it’s all about the lighting. When customers feel beautiful (or handsome) while they’re shopping, you’ve got great Feng Shui.

The recesses of your store, or the places you may consider unimportant because “no one sees them,” take on a vital part in creating great Feng Shui. Essentially, *all* areas should be clean, attractive, and organized. Flurries of activity, with all the attendant mess and disorder, happen every day as a natural and necessary part of running a successful business. The key to keeping prosperity flowing *in* the door is to “stay in the loop” and reorganize the various areas between bursts of activity. This is one of the most powerful ways to maintain the

financial health and well being of your business. Consider disorder as the exhalation and order as the inhalation. As with all living things, the goal is to keep your store breathing! Products arrive, are unpacked, stored, displayed, and sold or returned. Bathroom, storeroom, and office areas are kept orderly and clean. The whole store functions better when all areas are fully recognized as equals in the family of spaces that make up your business. (And someone *does* see the back rooms of the store – you!)

### ***The Five Elements***

Essential Feng Shui views the five elements of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water as the basic building blocks of life. All five elements are present within our bodies, and represent different aspects of our human experience. Because there is an instinctual resonance that occurs when we're in an environment composed of all five elements, your store's success is best "held in place" when they are all included in your space. Each element is expressed in a wide variety of ways, and learning to work with them is like learning a new language. The more fluent you become, the better!

#### *The Wood element is found in:*

- wooden furniture and accessories.
- all plants and flowers, including silk and dried.
- plant-based cloth and textiles such as cotton and rayon.
- things made out of paper
- floral upholstery, wall coverings, draperies, and linens.
- art portraying gardens, plants, and flowers.
- columnar shapes, such as pillars and pedestals.
- vertical stripes.
- blue and green tones

#### *The Fire element is found in:*

- lighting, including electric, candles, and fireplaces.
- items made from animals, such as fur, leather, bone, silk, and wool
- art portraying people or animals.
- art depicting sunshine, fire, or other bright illumination.
- triangles, pyramids, and cone shapes.
- red tones

*The Earth element is found in:*

- adobe, brick, and tile.
- ceramic and earthenware objects.
- square and rectangular shapes.
- art portraying earthy landscapes.  
horizontal stripes.
- yellow and all earthtones.

*The Metal element is found in:*

- all metals, including stainless steel, copper, brass, and aluminum.
- cement, and stone such as marble, granite, and flagstone.
- natural crystals and gemstones.
- art and sculpture made from metal or stone.
- circular, oval, and arched shapes.
- white and light pastels.

*The Water element is found in:*

- fountains and water features.
- reflective surfaces such as cut crystal, glass, and mirrors.
- flowing, free-form shapes.
- art portraying water.
- black and all dark tones, such as charcoal gray and navy blue.

Each element also brings essential qualities into your store that, when balanced, environmentally nurture and sustain your customers:

- The Wood element fosters intuition and creativity.
- The Fire element kindles healthy emotional responses.
- The Earth element embraces sensuality and relaxation.
- The Metal element strengthens mental acuity.
- The Water element enhances introspection and inspiration.

As with all things, an overabundance or lack of an element can unbalance the store and produce undesirable results.

- Too much Wood can promote a sense of being overwhelmed, while too little can impede customers' ability to connect with your merchandise.

- Too much Fire stimulates impatience and impulsive behavior, while too little chills friendly interactions.
- Too much Earth creates an atmosphere that's overly serious or conservative, while too little promotes clutter and a lack of sensuality.
- Too much Metal creates mental rigidity; while too little encourages indecisiveness and procrastination.
- Too much Water promotes spacey behavior and diminishes productivity, while too little boosts stress and anxiety.

Start by elementally assessing your showroom. Make a column for each element on paper and take an elemental survey. For instance, white walls would be in the Metal column, wooden display tables under Wood, black shelving under Water, etc. This is to ascertain whether your existing showroom is “heavy” on some elements and “light” on others. Ultimately, your goal is to include **all** elements in ways that enhance the space.

Make note of:

- Things literally made out of an element, such as Wooden or Metal furnishings and display cases.
- Items associated with an element such as a slate entryway (Metal), a mirrored wall (Water), or columns (Wood).
- Colors related to each element, like a red chair (Fire) or a yellow counter (Earth).
- Artwork and décor that portray an element, such as “Fiery” photographs of models or “Woody” floral display fabric.

Elemental literacy can really help you make masterful decisions about the overall design of your store as well as individual displays. You'll notice that there are innumerable ways to suggest, combine, and balance the elements that can accommodate your store's architecture and inventory. Experiment with elemental combinations and watch the results. When specifically chosen for their elemental qualities, anything from wall color to a vase of flowers can add missing elements and make the showroom “pop” into perfect balance.

### ***The Essential Feng Shui Grid***

Arranging a business to hold success in place is the primary goal of Essential Feng Shui, and one of the most intriguing tools we utilize is the Grid (see

Figure 1). Many storeowners discover that their challenges in business are directly related to the Grid areas that they dislike, don't use, or haven't organized in their stores.

To Grid your store, begin with a bird's-eye drawing, such as a blueprint or footprint sketch of your space. Draw only *your* space, even if it's connected to other businesses. Include everything that's considered individually *yours*. For instance, you wouldn't include public bathrooms that might be located nearby, but you would include a bathroom that's exclusively yours.

- Place your drawing so that the **front entrance** is at the bottom of the page, as shown in Figure 1.
- Draw a square or rectangle around the perimeter of the footprint that includes every part of the store inside it.
- Divide the rectangle into nine equal sections, like a Tic-Tac-Toe board, and label the nine squares of the Grid accordingly.

When your store is a simple rectangle, you'll find that all of the Grid's areas are located inside your business (see Figure 2). If it's another shape, such as an L, S, T, or U, you'll find Grid areas located outside the structure of your business. Here are some clarifying points:

1. Don't be concerned about interior walls. Depending on your store's layout, Grid areas can span part of one large room or several small areas.
2. If your store has more than one story, *partial or full*, the Grid of the main floor will translate up to a second story or down to a lower level.
3. When your front entrance is built on a diagonal, you'll have to make a call as to which way to place the Grid. Often, it's the direction your eye is first drawn to when you open the door (see Figure 3).
4. When your front door is recessed, you may be entering your store through the Health and Family, Center, or Children and Creativity Grid areas, as in Figure 4. If your front door is recessed all the way back, so that you immediately have to turn to enter the main part of the store, rotate the Grid to fit over the main body of the building, as shown in Figure 5.
5. Consult an Essential Feng Shui practitioner if you need help.

Assess your Grid profile by looking at each area of your store and determining:

- What do I like/dislike about the space?
- What do I like/dislike about the things located here?
- What is my first thought when I see the area?
- Do I feel comfortable and safe, and would my customers feel comfortable and safe here?
- Is it organized?
- How do the qualities of the area correlate with the part of the Grid where it's located?
- What specific improvements or enhancements can I make?

This can be a very revealing process! The objects and architecture you surround yourself with hold certain impressions and conditions in place. You may find that one or more Grid areas correlate with what's working - or not working - in your business. For instance, many storeowners discover that a chaotic back room correlates with the Wealth and Prosperity area of the Grid, accurately reflecting their business's financial status. Prosperity begins to flow into their lives when they dig the room out and get organized. As one client says, "The Grid gave me a heck of the good reason to clean up behind the scenes."

As a storeowner, the "Love and Marriage" Grid area relates to partners, co-owners, key employees, or other professionally "intimate" relationships you have as a result of being in business. The "Health and Family" area relates to most employees, and the "Helpful People and Travel" is associated with vendors, wholesalers, and other helpful people who are located outside the store. Both "Children and Creativity" and "Helpful People and Travel" are directly related to customers. If any of these business relationships are not going well, work to improve the area that correlates with them.

When a Grid area is "missing," or located outside of the store, see if you can define that area with "beauty marks" that are both appealing and in scale with your location - and your budget. Lighting, special plants, water features, furniture, or sculptures can be aesthetically combined to upgrade the space. If there's nothing you can do, turn your focus inside the store. Grid each room the same way you did the store and pay special attention to enhancing the areas in the rooms that correlate with the missing Grid area of the store. Choose items and designs that relate to the Grid area you're working with. For instance, a Prosperity area can be enhanced with a display of some of your most expensive merchandise, an especially beautiful piece of art, or a vibrantly colored wall.

The recipe for great Feng Shui is now yours. When you masterfully blend the right ingredients together, you can produce a winning retail atmosphere that's irresistibly appealing to your customers and a magnet for success for you.

*(For re-printing purposes, these images available upon request.)*

Figure 1 – The Essential Feng Shui Grid

Figure 2 – This basic sketch of a rectangular store, with its front entrance in the Knowledge and Self-Cultivation area of the Grid, has all of the Grid areas contained in the physical structure of the store.

Figure 3 – This is a sketch of a store with a diagonal door. The entryway wall, floor covering, and direction in which the door opens lead the eye and help determine which way to Grid the store.

Figure 4 – This recessed front entrance is located in the Health and Family area of the store's Grid. Notice that a portion of Health and Family, and Knowledge and Self-Cultivation, are outside the store's structure.

Figure 5 – When a front entrance is recessed to the very back of a store, the Grid is turned to fit over the main body of the store, as seen here. Notice that part of Knowledge and Self-Cultivation, Career, and Helpful People and Travel are missing from the structure of the store.

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