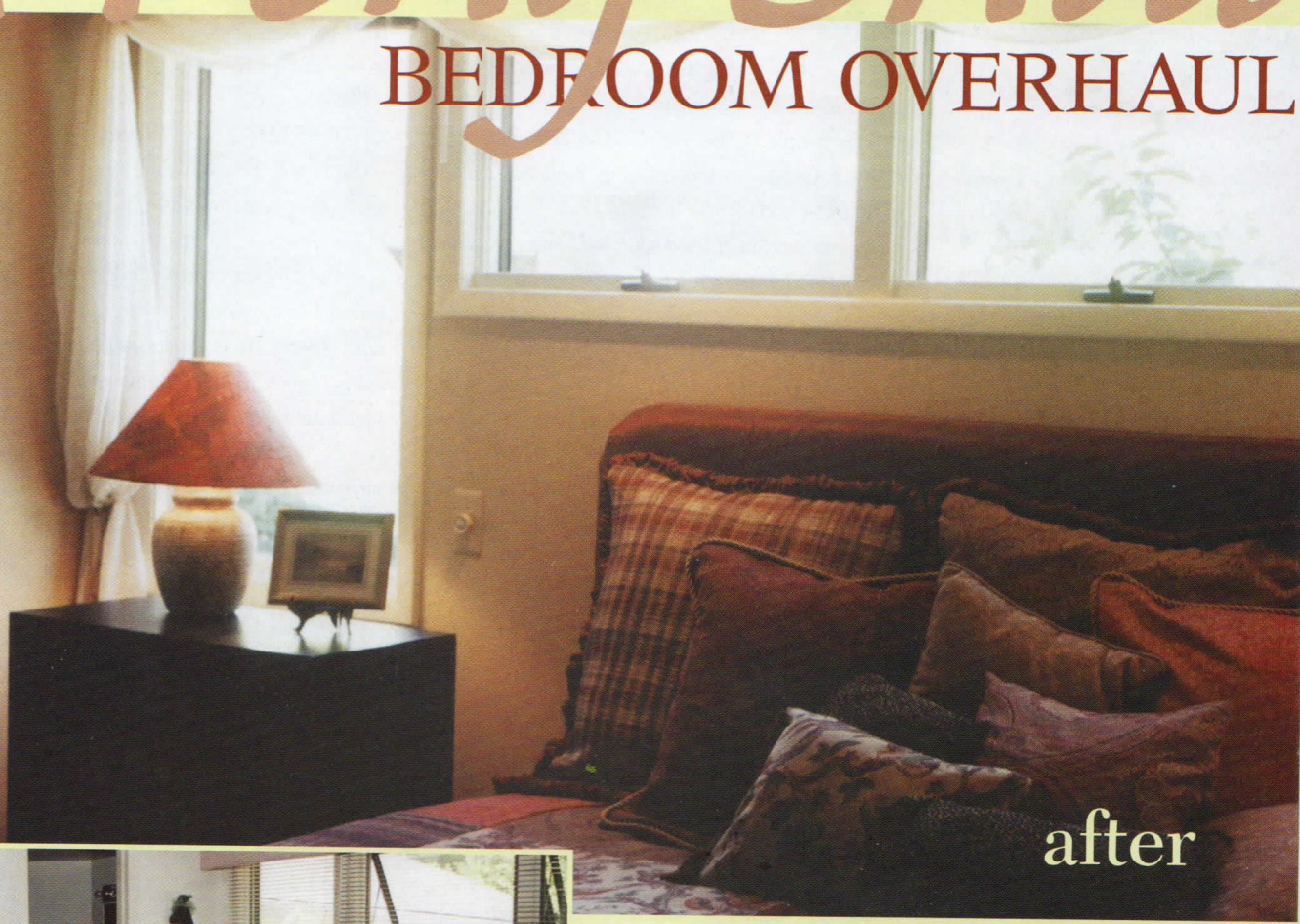
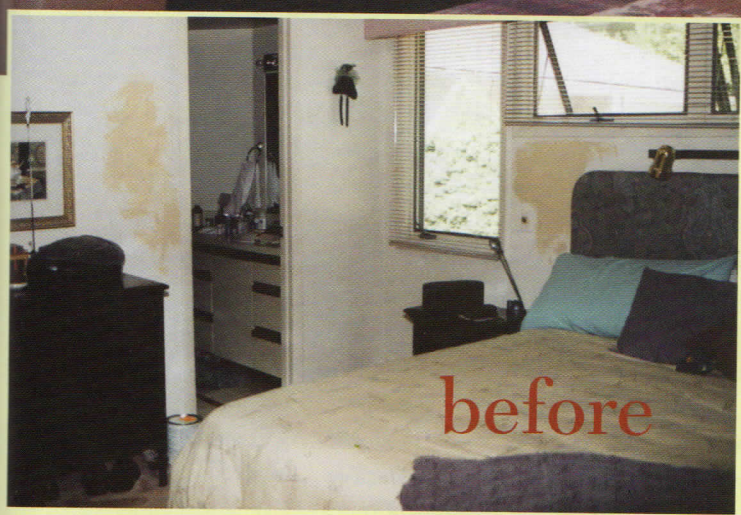


A Feng Shui

BEDROOM OVERHAUL



after



before

There are as many different approaches to organizing as there are spaces in need of it. One discipline with much to teach about organization is feng shui, often defined as the Chinese art of placement—or, as feng shui consultant Catherine Hilker puts it, “the study of an environment that enhances the quality of life”—and one space often in need of an overhaul is the bedroom.

Here Hilker chronicles a bedroom “redo,” explaining how optimal placement satisfies organizing problems and encourages a most relaxing ambiance as well. Delving deeper into the esoteric components of this fascinating art, professional organizer and feng shui consultant Janet Hall elaborates on the impact of “yin” and “yang” elements in creating an ideal bedroom atmosphere. —Eds.

by CATHERINE HILKER • photographs by HEATHER VIVIO

“**A** tranquil retreat that is warm and cozy. A space that promotes deep, restful sleep.” These were the objectives for a master bedroom redo as requested by my clients Carol and Charles.

This couple is like many today. They have busy, hectic schedules as mandated by their careers, elementary school-aged children, their families, and other community-related activities. They are a family of integrity and they honor their commitments, schedules, and obligations made to others. Because of this, they especially needed a sanctuary to sink into at the end of a stressful day. What better way to start off the New Year than by retiring together to a cozy, sensual retreat each evening—a sanctuary that honors their deep commitment to each other, a refuge to escape the stress of daily living, and a

problems. When utilized in their bedrooms, feng shui has helped many of my clients to sleep better and to renew deep connections and intimacy with their partners—two keys to leading healthy, holistic lives.

UNDERSTANDING FENG SHUI

So, what is feng shui? Simply stated, it is the study of an environment that enhances the quality of life. It is an art, a science, and spiritual in nature. It is the process of surrounding oneself with inspirational and uplifting symbols, art, color, furniture, and objects. It is understanding that everything, every object, is alive, connected, and always changing. Your beloved antique is alive with the memories of your dear grandmother. Your wedding ring is alive with the love of your partner.

Feng shui is predicated on the belief that the

“Sanctuary is a gift to yourself. If you identify a certain space in your home as a sanctuary you are investing in your soul.”

—*Christopher Forrest McDowell*

space that nourishes and replenishes their bodies while they sleep.

Unfortunately, many Americans recreate their hectic lives in their bedrooms. In the space that should provide restful slumber, we often find commanding television sets that impede intimacy, computers that herald long hours of work, exercise equipment nagging to be used, and stacks of books begging to be read. It's no wonder that 33% of Americans, according to the National Sleep Foundation, are getting 6½ or fewer hours of sleep per night and are therefore classified as sleep-deprived.

Sleep deprivation causes a myriad of problems, including fluctuations in blood sugar levels and a reduction in both brain function and in the body's ability to fight infection and disease. According to online *ABC News* reports, lack of sleep is also detrimental to our sex lives.

Fortunately, there are simple solutions to these

choices you make, whether positive or negative, have ripple effects on those around you. The choices can be small or large, but generate a significant impact just the same. Change is constant, so it makes sense that our environment should change along with us. No longer need a guest room? Turn it into a personal retreat. Never use the dining room? Turn it into a home office. Why clutter up our lives with things that don't work, or things we've outgrown or stopped using? In order to feel comfortable and productive to you, your space must not be allowed to stagnate. This is why continually taking inventory of your belongings and purging on a regular basis is important.

Comfort and safety are also inherently important in feng shui. It's so much more difficult to be happy and healthy if you spend eight hours a day in an uncomfortable chair or every night in an uncomfortable bed. Safety enters the picture due to the discomfort it causes: The feeling of uneasiness ▶



Top Photo: Carol and Charles' bed now features a supportive headboard and a comforter handmade by Carol.

Left Photo: Purging clutter like this allows restful energy to prevail.

Right Photo: This window became more "yin" with soft fabric concealing its hard edges.



When adding artwork, choose a scene that is meaningful to you like this painting of Catalina Island where Charles and Carol were married.

and vulnerability upon entering a dark house or sitting with your back to a door or window are eliminated when good feng shui is practiced. In a bedroom, feng shui principles counteract arrangements that make a person feel unsafe, even if only subconsciously.

FENG SHUI IN THE BEDROOM

“Sensual Serenity” is how Terah Kathryn Collins describes the nature of a well-designed bedroom in her book *The Western Guide to Feng Shui, Room by Room*. Creating bedrooms that soothe, appeal to our senses, and support us on all levels is key.

Safety is important in our bedrooms, even in ways that verge on the metaphorical. Avoid hanging heavy objects over the bed or you’ll spend your nights dreading their collapse. Furniture with sharp, pointed corners and protruding hardware are

dangerous and cause injuries, especially when we are in a sleepy state. Soften them with draped fabrics or plants, or angle them out of pathways. Keep pathways clear of clutter and storage items to prevent serious injury from falls.

Bed placement is particularly important. A bed located in the direct path of a doorway can be unsettling, but positioning the bed where there is no clear view of the door leaves you feeling vulnerable. Finding a compromise can be challenging.

Insuring our sleeping quarters are comfortable makes sense when you consider the amount of time spent in them. Therefore, the highest-quality mattress you can afford is paramount. It is very difficult to sleep well in an uncomfortable bed. Next, use blankets, sheets, and pillow covers that feel delicious next to your skin. Imagine the sensual welcome they will offer every night when you crawl

into bed. Select high-quality pillows that match your sleeping style: stomach, back, and side sleepers each need different types of pillows. Reading lights should be functional yet easy on the eyes.

Create a sensual delight in the bedroom with colors, textures, pleasing scents, and soothing sounds. Soft textures like cotton, silk, satin, and chenille encourage intimacy. Flowers, oils, and candles enhance romance. Select art that depicts lovers or brings back memories of romantic getaways. Choose a mutually inspirational object or piece of art to greet you every morning as you start your day. Warm tones for the walls and decor, and soft, diffused lighting also encourage intimacy.

Endeavor to produce a sense of peacefulness. Many bedrooms I see are the antithesis of calm. Rooms that are crowded with too much furniture, large mirrors, televisions, computers, telephones, and exercise equipment make it difficult to rest and relax. Keep only the bare essentials in furnishings. If moving electronics and exercise equipment to other parts of the home is not an option, use your creativity to “put them to bed” at night. Use screens, covers, cabinets, or beautiful, soft fabrics to conceal these items. Add sounds and visuals that enhance the feeling of calm. Experiment to discover what works for you.

Be conscious of the state of your dresser drawers, cabinets, closets, and storage. Being organized is essential to starting your day off right. Even if your room appears neat and tidy, the chaos behind closed doors and in other areas of the room “speaks” to you, and often what you “hear” is very draining. Dressing each morning from a closet that is chaotic affirms that your life is chaotic. Searching through unorganized drawers and cabinets is frustrating and time-consuming. If your intimate space is also visually disorganized, you have a constant reminder to “do something.” It requires a lot of energy to suppress the nagging reminders to “do something.” Any amount of disorganization detracts from your room’s serenity.

Equality is key in a master bedroom space. Each partner should share the same or similar view from the bed. For example, does one partner wake up to a view of the toilet each day and the other to beautiful plants? A simple solution to this dilemma is to paint some “plants” on the back of the bathroom

door and keep the door shut while you sleep. Choose nightstands that are matching or similar in size. Allot space on each side of the bed no matter how small it might be.

THE YIN AND YANG OF CAROL AND CHARLES

My first impression of Carol and Charles’ space was that it was the opposite of serene. The most comfortable spaces have balanced yin and yang elements, but their room was home to an abundance of “yang,” including the hard angles of the room’s architecture and furniture, the stimulating nature of three large mirrors, an abundance of electronic equipment that included two large alarm clocks, a stereo system, a television, a VCR, and a telephone. The off-white walls and trim, the off-white metal mini-blinds and the contemporary brass lighting over the headboard also added more yang elements to the room.

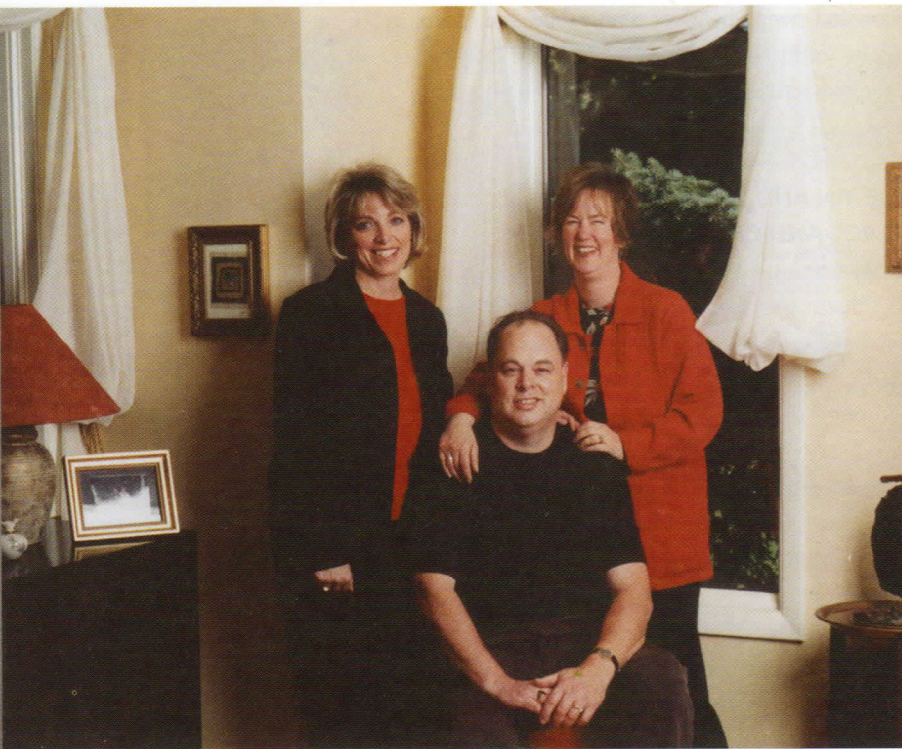
Yang qualities are described as masculine, active, bright, hot, hard, dry, plain, large, geometric, or shiny. When an extreme amount of yang elements exist in a space, especially mirrors, sleep disorders are common. Also, a television’s commanding presence coupled with too many yang elements is not conducive to intimacy and connection with one another.

More yin elements were required to balance the stimulating nature of their room. Yin qualities are the opposite of yang and are described as feminine, quiet, dark, cool, soft, wet, ornate, small, floral, or muted. Softening the room was important, and this was accomplished in a number of ways. Curtains were added to soften the blinds. Two of the three large mirrors were removed. The television was housed in an armoire. The room was painted a warm, soft gold. Carol made a lush, ornate duvet cover, using opulent fabrics in rich tones and textures. They also added a soothing fountain which they owned but had never used. Making these changes balanced the room’s yin and yang qualities.

Next, my clients decided to purchase bedroom furniture. The purchase included a substantial supportive bed frame with headboards and footboards (great for feeling supported all night long), matching nightstands, an armoire, and a single chest. This purchase was important for two reasons. First, ►



Top Photograph: Rich textiles and soft, fluffy pillows contribute to yin energy. Above: A “water element” such as this fountain adds to a relaxing atmosphere.



Carol and Charles
(with Catherine Hilker)
now find their bedroom
much more inviting.

the old bedroom furniture was not cohesive and unified. Each had brought pieces from his or her life before their marriage. Carol had a triple dresser and a vanity of different styles and colors. Charles had two “antique” dressers that didn’t match. Also, Charles had a nightstand next to the bed and Carol a bookcase. The room felt disjointed. The new furniture pulled the room together and created cohesion. The purchase also gave equal weight to each partner’s side of the bed.

The second important reason for purchasing the furniture is that it required Carol and Charles to do a major purge and to organize. It also committed them to downsizing and simplifying. Reducing the amount of furniture was a component of making the room feel more spacious and tranquil (less is more), but the purging and organizing was also a large factor.

An organized space radiates calm even if you don’t see the organization. Every drawer, shelf, and surface, including the closet, was reviewed. Any item that did not contribute to the functionality of the room was relocated. For example, the extensions for the dining room table that were stored in the closet were moved to a more appropriate area of the home. Laundry baskets, sewing projects, and

excess books were also moved. In fact, Carol noted that 25% of the items stored in the bedroom belonged somewhere else in the house. It is important to store items in relation to their function. This way you’ll not spend a lot of time trying to find something or deciding where to store it.

A side benefit of the purge was that Carol rediscovered some old, cherished letters written to her by her husband. She spent some time reading all of them and recapturing magical moments they had shared together. What a great way to “initiate” the new space and what a delightful way to spend an afternoon.

Having less furniture meant my clients needed to devise creative ways to store their belongings. For example, they found that by rolling their clothes, they were able to store more clothes in their dresser drawers. Using drawer organizers for jewelry and makeup cleared clutter from the dresser surfaces. Organizers in the closet helped make room for Carol’s clothing, which was previously stored in another room. Integrating Carol’s clothes into the master bedroom closet was important to both parties: it added a further element of cohesion and team spirit.

The final step was to create a sensual and romantic aura for the room. Carol and Charles now awaken to a painting of Catalina Island, where they were married in a very private and personal ceremony. The wall color and the colors and textures of the duvet cover were selected to be sensual as well as inviting and warm. Art and objects depicting couples were placed in the bedroom, with Carol adding a pair of candles to the dresser and incorporating a pair of birds into the design on the duvet cover. She also put heart-shaped potpourri containers in many of the dresser drawers.

Once all the steps were done, the transformation was remarkable. Carol and Charles did indeed create a tranquil retreat that was warm and elegant, a space that provided a refuge from their busy lives. They created a sanctuary for themselves by being willing to embrace change and deepen their connection to each other.

Catherine Hilker is a professional feng shui consultant serving the metro Detroit area. Contact her at (248) 547-4965.