

How to Improve Your Life by Improving Your Home

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Why do we Decorate Our Homes?

Why do we decorate our homes?

For some people it's a statement, a visual cue for visitors to give them a glimpse inside of our personality. Yet for others it's important to set the appropriate mood depending on what type of people visit. For example, if you frequently entertain people from your office or your spouse's office, you may want your home's design to portray success and elegance.

However, for most of us home design is about complimenting our personality so that the home becomes an extension of ourselves. If you are bold and passionate, perhaps you will decorate with bold and passionate colors and items to make you feel "at home" and at ease. If instead you're more of the laid-back type, a bold and passionate theme may make you feel uncomfortable. It could make you feel irritable and on edge, which in turn causes you to squabble with your family members.

Now think about that for a moment. If you expect to throw dinner parties for your colleagues frequently, chances are (depending on where you work) you have an idea about how the living room, dining room and even kitchen should look. You probably want to radiate a sense of success so that your colleagues will respect and even look up to you.

Perhaps as you visit their homes, you'll get a sense of what sort of items portray the home's occupants as successful. Maybe you'll see crystal vases, rare artwork, exquisite table settings, and expensive furniture. You may even notice that the furniture and the carpet is white – very elegant and pristine.

Now you have to consider how this sort of interior design would make you feel and how it would fit into your own life. Sure it looked great in someone else's house – but is it YOU?

Maybe you can see your cat knocking over those crystal vases and sharpening her nails on the expensive art. Perhaps the fragile table settings seem awfully "dainty" to you – a person who likes to go hiking on the weekends. And forget the white carpet and white furniture – you know it would only be a matter of days before there are grape juice and spaghetti stains all over the place.

So does this mean that people shouldn't portray success and elegance as described above? Of course not! If those items fit your taste, make you feel good, and fit your lifestyle, then decorate in that manner. If they don't fit your life and/or make you feel good, then you need to discover what suits you.

You see, designing should be about YOU. It shouldn't be about what visitors to your home will think about your designs. It shouldn't be about what items you need to display so that your entertaining guests view you in some particular way.

No, when you think about your home's design you should have only yourself in mind. Don't ask, "what does my home say about me?" Instead, ask yourself "how do I feel when I'm in my home?" If you can answer that question honestly, then you are well on your way to turning your house into a home.

Your House, Yourself

Even though you shouldn't decorate with others in mind, your house still can say a lot about you. Indeed, sometimes your house naturally takes on your personality and almost seems to mimic what's going on in your life.

For example, some people describe their job situation in negative terms, using words like "dead-end job." These people feel like they have no choice in the matter and they feel trapped at the job. Perhaps they feel like they need to stay with a dead-end job because they can't neglect their bills, or they have children who are depending on them.

When you walk through their house it often comes as no surprise that they're "trapped" and suffocating in their own home too. Perhaps they've arranged the furniture in such a way that it makes the rooms like smaller. Perhaps they've chosen darker colors that, rather than provide a "cozy and warm" feeling, instead give a claustrophobic feel to the living space. It's as if the person's psychological state of feeling trapped at work has seeped into her home.

Or take the person who's life seems to be a series of chaotic loose ends that are never quite tied up. Her relationships leave her hanging, she starts projects with glee and then drops them later – unfinished – when her enthusiasm predictably fades.

Take a stroll through this woman's house and you may feel it is chaotic as her life. Clutter abounds, swallowing up the wall space, the shelves, the cupboards, the closets and even the floor. Here and there you will find a drawer open, as if she was looking for something but was distracted by something else bright and shiny.

Just like the woman who was feeling trapped, this woman's chaotic life seeped into her home.

Here's a real-life example: I knew a woman who was unfaithful to her husband. She said the spark faded and she just wasn't happy any more. Indeed, prior to getting married she had a long string of boyfriends (not to mention a long resume with lots of jobs she held just for the short-term). In a way, it seemed like she easily grew bored of many things in her life. Let's just say that leftovers sat in her refrigerator until she threw them away (I mean really...you can't be expected to eat the same thing two days in a row).

Her home was no different. Her "unsettled" psychological state – almost being indecisive and unable to commit to any one thing for an extended period of time – was reflected in her home. She arranged and re-arranged the furniture constantly. She would buy a themed set of wall décor to accent her home. A few months later she would grow bored and buy a different theme.

When she had the money she made more drastic changes, such as buying all new furniture, painting the walls a different color, completely remodeling various rooms, etc.

She talked often of getting a new house. It's not that she was looking for a bigger house or a better location or a different floor plan necessarily. What she was looking for was something different. Plain and simple, she wanted change.

It makes sense, doesn't it? Think about your friend's and their houses. Chances are their homes are reflections on their personality. Your detail-oriented friend probably has a clean home with each decorating item in the home placed with great consideration and care. Your laid-back friend probably has the type of furniture that beckons you to put your feet up and relax. Your "absent minded professor" type friend may have a home that looks like she's laid odd things down in odd places (and very likely forgot about them).

It just makes sense that your personality would come into your home. And in fact, if you can do this effectively you will have a home that you will feel very comfortable in.

But the reverse is also true. You can decorate a home in such a way that instead of it taking on your personality (which is a nice complement to you), you start taking on its personality.

For example, if you close in the open spaces and block some of the light, you may suddenly start sniping at your spouse because you're feeling suffocated. Your relationship can actually suffer because you don't feel comfortable in your own home.

Now suppose that you used this bit of knowledge to your advantage. For example, let's suppose that you purposely create open, welcoming spaces in your home. Perhaps then a job or relationship that's confining won't feel quite so bad. Or perhaps you feel so content in your home and so much discontent in your job or relationship that you realize it's time to move on and seek something better.

Or let's suppose you can categorize your life as stressful and chaotic. Unfortunately, the chaos is reflected in your home as well. For some this would be ok – IF they actually enjoyed chaos. But suppose you find it stressful and would like to simplify your life. Perhaps you can start by simplifying your home design...for the amount of time you spend in your home it's bound to have an impact on your psychological and emotional state. Next thing you know, you're feeling more peaceful and better-equipped to deal with the other stressful things in your life.

Does this seem to simplistic?

Perhaps, but that doesn't mean it's effective.

Think back to times when you've stayed at a friend's or relative's house or even at a hotel. If the person had a decidedly different approach to life than you do, then chances are their house was decorated much differently than you would decorate your own.

Let's suppose for a moment that you went out of town to visit a friend. Perhaps she has a very extroverted, aggressive personality. When you entered her home, perhaps you were overwhelmed by "loud" and bold colors, and décor that seemed to scream for attention.

Now if you are the calmer more introverted type of person, this sort of "high energy design may have seemed sort of fun...at first. Perhaps you enjoyed the boost it gave you. Your heart may have raced a little, your blood pressure may have come up, you may have felt like you had just drank a few cups of coffee and you were ready to tackle anything. You felt alert and alive.

Sure it feels good for a day or two.

But if you stayed for more than a few days, you may have felt yourself starting to feel overwhelmed and on edge. Just like someone who's not used to caffeine who starts drinking coffee – you start out with a shot of energy and a nice alert feeling, but if you keep drinking it you end up collapsing into a pile of jittery nerves.

A "loud" décor for a naturally quiet person will have the same effect. It saps your energy eventually. Instead of feeling that boost, you'll feel the crash. You're tired. It's too much stimulus. You want to go home.

(Sadly you may not have even realized it was the home that caused you to feel that way. Perhaps you thought you were just in a bad mood, or you may have attributed it to your friend.)

So as you can see how you decorate your house can and does have an affect on you, your moods and even your life. Thus it makes sense to give careful consideration to the task when you do start decorating your home.

Naturally of course this doesn't mean that every room in your house will look the same or have the same "flavor." While your house overall will compliment your personality, presumably each of your rooms has a specific purpose. You'll want to not only choose a decorative theme that you like, but also one that serves its intended purpose.

For example – your bedroom is easily one of the most important rooms in your house. If you primarily use it has a haven to escape the grind and stress of daily life, then you will want to decorate it in a manner that enhances and encourages its intended purpose. Inviting furniture and lights suitable for reading may be your idea of a good way to relax. Perhaps you prefer scented candles, dim lighting and soft music. Or perhaps your idea of unwinding after the long day is a recliner (yes, in the bedroom!) and a glass of wine in front of a fireplace.

On the other hand, perhaps you view your bedroom not as a place to unwind, but rather as a place to enjoy romantic and sensual encounters. In that case you'd decorate with an eye for encouraging such encounters (which includes utilizing items that are attractive to all five senses).

These ideas are fine for the bedroom, as you are trying to create a mellow, relaxing environment. But perhaps you have other ideas for the kitchen. You want it lively and fun, a place that wakes up your senses and encourages you to enjoy cooking.

Two different rooms, two different designs. In general you can figure that whatever fits your lifestyle, your personality and fits your room's purpose is a good place to start when you begin decorating.

But there's a slight problem if you aren't living single. Decorating your home to transform it into a place you enjoy being is hard enough when it's just you living there. However, many people have others living with them, such as children, spouses or other friends and family.

Indeed, decorating with a significant person in your life (such as a spouse or other significant other) can easily become a statement about the relationship itself. If the relationship is full of power struggles, then you are likely to see that reflected in the home.

For example, if there seems to be an imbalance of power and it's the husband who seems to wield the most power in the relationship, then you wouldn't be surprised to walk through the couple's home and see that the decorations were done with him in mind. You may see decorative items that accent his personality. You may notice that the photos in the house are all about him. Perhaps any souvenirs are from his travels, not hers. You may even find that he has an entire room that's his and his only, but she doesn't have any space to call her own.

The interior home design just seems to reinforce that the relationship is not balanced. And yet as we already discussed, the way you decorate can have an impact on your outside life. Does this mean that balancing the interior design to reflect both his and her tastes could aid in bringing balance to the relationship as a whole?

Yes!

Nothing is guaranteed of course, but there's a very good chance that it could help. The partner wielding the power may sense the balance in the home, and start treating his partner with more respect and as an equal in the relationship.

Could it hurt? Perhaps. But if a partner sensing the balance in the home design becomes threatened, then the belittled partner ought not worry about the design so much as she should worry about what type of relationship she has with this person! Forget hiring an interior designer or a Feng Shui consultant – a counselor or even a divorce lawyer might be a better choice.

But I digress...

Often what's more likely to happen in a male-female relationship is that the male leaves the decorating to his female (sometimes it's the other way around, or sometimes it's one partner in a male-male relationship or one partner in a female-female relationship that is left in charge of decorating). Typically one person says, "I trust you, I'm not good at this decorating stuff, you do it."

That's understandable. And if the partner who's doing the decorating really knows her partner and takes his tastes and personality into consideration, it might actually work out.

But truth be told, it's best if both partners can work on the design project together.

Now here's the other thing you might be realizing – while hiring an interior decorator is fine if you are a little low on ideas, you shouldn't have a designer who completely takes over and designs your rooms with little or no input from you.

Indeed, I often shutter while watching some of those popular reality-TV-type shows that center on interior design. Sometimes they will kick the homeowners out and completed re-do a room without giving much thought to what the homeowners might like or need. Then you can tell if it's a hit or miss based on the homeowner's reactions. I've seen delight. I've seen polite smiles trying to cover up dislike. And I've seen sheer horror.

My point is this: if you hire someone to design or decorate, don't let them decide what to do in your home. That person is going to enter the job with a slight bias no matter how professional he or she is. What you need is someone who is willing to listen to what you like in a room, how you want to feel in the room, and how this will all complement you.

A good designer is as good at psychology as he or she is good at design. Good designers have to have this duality in order to know not only what accents will look good in a room, but how those accents will complement your personality, your lifestyle, and your vision of the room's purpose and how you want the room to make you feel.

Good designers don't just show you catalogs and slide presentations and then ask you what you like. Good designers show you these things and then watch your face – an eyebrow cocking, a twinkle in the eye, a smile.

A good designer will help lead you away from ideas about how you think you "should" design a room to ideas about how to design a room that will make you feel good.

Oh yes, a really good designer is hard to find, probably expensive, and yet well worth the money (after all, we aren't just talking about a room – we are often times dealing with your life being reflected in this room).

Since design is such an individual thing, perhaps a consultant is a better choice for you than a designer. You can hire a design consultant, a Feng Shui consultant, or similar. Once again, you want someone to help you...not someone who's out to control the whole process.

Whether you decide to hire someone to help you is up to you. But regardless, it's a good idea to understand how your home's designs and decorations will affect you before you actually start redesigning.

Let's jump right in by talking about color...

Using Color and Light to Transform Your House into a Home

Two of the biggest factors regarding the way you'll feel about your home as well as the way you'll feel when you're in your home are light and color.

Before we delve into this discussion, let me make a few notes. For our purposes I'm putting light and color into the same general discussion. For simplicity's sake, color refers to just that – color or hues. When I refer to light, I'm referring to *sources* of light – like windows and lamps – and ways to reflect light to get the most mileage out of your source of light.

While at first glance these seem like two separate topics, we simply cannot separate them because they are so related. What is color? It's nothing more than the visible wavelengths of light. Without light, color does not exist.

Likewise when we start talking about ways to reflect light, we'll be talking about color. After all, color determines how much or how little light is reflected off of a surface. Lighter colors reflect more light than darker colors. Hence you cannot “open up” a room that's painted in dark colors, because the dark surfaces are absorbing all of the light.

Now let's jump into our discussion about color...

Color Psychology

Color psychology is extremely fascinating and yet not completely understood by scientists. Nonetheless, experts agree that color DOES have a physiological effect on people that can actually alter their mood.

Indeed, this effect is so strong that you don't even need to see the color. Blindfolded persons have been shown to display physiological changes when they were bathed in different-colored lights. Thousands of years ago the Egyptians seemed to already be aware of this fact, as they used different colored lights to produce different effects on patients in their healing temples.

Corporate America tends to be well aware of how color affects the body. For example, have you noticed how much the colors like red, orange and even brown are used in restaurants, fast food places, and other food establishments? That's because these colors are thought to stimulate appetite.

Indeed, red, brown, and orange are common food colors as found in nature. During our hunter gatherer days humans learned to identify “good” foods by color as well as other cues. Think of tomatoes, oranges, carrots, bell peppers, potatoes and more – those are all red, brown, and orange foods.

On the other hand, you don't see much in the way of black, blue and purple foods. There are some, yes – like blueberries. However, back in those hunter-gathering days if you saw some sort of blue, black or purple food, there's a good chance that it was spoiled or rotten.

That's one theory. However, red is also a very "stimulating" color that can even increase your heart rate. Shades of blue are thought to be calming colors. As such, red in a restaurant could rev up not just your cardiovascular system but your appetite as well. And blue may not suppress your appetite because of the association with spoiled food, but perhaps because it relaxes you and in turn decreases your appetite.

Again, these are different theories of why color affects things like appetite. But the fact remains that even though we may disagree but how it affects our bodies, we can't argue about whether it affects us because clearly it does.

So what do these little color tidbits tell you? They suggest that if you want your kitchen and dining room guests to come hungry and enjoy your food, it's not a bad idea to paint the dining room in shades of orange, red or brown. Or at the very least, try to avoid painting the room in shades of blue, purple or black.

Now while color does have these noticeable and measurable physiological affects on people, there are also cultural and individual differences that need to be considered when you start thinking about painting your home.

For example, in some cultures white is associated with mourning, while in others it's associated with purity. In some parts of the world different colors are associated with different genders (e.g., in the U.S. it's blue for boys and pink for girls). As such, you'll need to consider the cultural connections you'd made about various colors before you start decorating.

Color preferences are also very unique to the individual. Everyone tends to have their "favorite colors" as well as colors they just don't care for. Some of these preferences may be tied to the physiological affects of color – in other words, perhaps we don't like colors that produce physiological affects that clash with our personalities and moods. On the other hand, color preferences may simply be unexplained differences that just happen irregardless of any sorts of theories we like to throw around.

Now the reason we are mentioning these things is because your individual preferences are extremely important when it comes to considering color when decorating your home. Color psychologists, Feng Shui consultants, and interior designers may suggest to you that you use certain colors to create a certain mood in your overall house as well as in individual rooms. However, please keep in mind that these are suggestions, guidelines, and places to start. Ultimately your personal preferences are more important than what the professionals say.

After all, you're the one who needs to live in the home. If a certain color turns you off but the color psychologist rave about it and suggest you use it, go with your gut! Ultimately your color preferences will largely influence your mood in your own home.

Now having said all that, let's take a brief look at the colors of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet), and see what we associate them with in terms of mood and other physiological effects. Keep in mind that cultural differences may mean that colors have different associations in your part of the world.

Red

The color red is a bold, passionate color. It can be associated with romantic notions and love (as is the case with red roses or various Valentine's Day gifts and cards), or it can signal danger or stopping (e.g., red street signs tend to warn of danger, tell you to stop, etc). Overall red is thought to be very stimulating and intense. Although you may not want to paint an entire room red, using red accents in rooms that you want to be stimulated in is a nice choice.

Orange

Orange is thought to be an emotional color, and has been used by some to bring joy and aid in healing grief. Also it's an appetite stimulant (like red), so it may be a good color choice for kitchens and dining rooms.

Yellow

The color yellow is associated with the sun, and as such is thought to be cheerful and stimulating (both increasing alertness and creativity). However, just like the sun it can easily cause negative effects if over used. The supposed happy yellow color seems to over - stimulate people when over used, and cause people to be edgy, lose their temper, etc. Some researchers suggest that babies cry more in bright yellow rooms. As such, be careful when applying yellow. Accents are better than covering entire walls.

Green

Green is one of the most popular – if not THE most popular – color used in decorating. Green is most often described by color researchers as a healing, soothing, relaxing color. If you are creating a room that you wish to be a calming place for you to be, using green in the room will help.

Blue

Blue is similar to green both because of the fact that it's a very popular decorating color, and also because of it's soothing properties. Blue is calming and peaceful, and thus makes a good choice for a bedroom or other place where you intend to rest.

Indigo

The color indigo is similar to blue and green with it's relaxing properties. Some astrologers and Feng Shui practitioners suggest that indigo is related to mysticism, understanding and intuition. This may be a good color to use in a room that you intend to meditate in.

Violet (Purple)

Violet is thought to be a sensitive, creative and inspiring color. In some areas of the world violet suggests wealth and success. However, the actual color is somewhat rare in natural settings – as such, it can appear shallow or fake.

What Colors Mean to You

Now that you have a somewhat general guideline as to what sorts of effects different colors can have on your mood, it's time for you to think about color personally makes you feel. Think about the colors you like and dislike. Think about your friends' and family members' homes – what colors do you like in their houses? Which colors do you dislike? How do different colors in various rooms make you feel?

Take a look around the color you've already put in your living space. Which rooms do you like the best? Which make you feel good? Think about whether color is a major factor in why you really like some of the rooms in your living space and perhaps don't like others quite as much.

Look into your closets as well to give you some clues as to what colors you prefer and how these colors make you feel. What color do you enjoy wearing when you want to feel sexy? Intelligent? Powerful? Relaxed?

As you consider these different colors, keep in mind that when it comes to color more isn't always better. Certain colors may simply be overwhelming if you went ahead and painted entire rooms all one color. Indeed, a little color can go a long

way. You can paint three walls in natural earth-tone shades, and then paint one wall with a particular color.

If you are talking about extremely vibrant colors like red which is very intense, or yellow which can be over stimulating, you can use the color sparingly by only using the color to paint trim in the room. Or you can skip the paint altogether and instead use colored accents to decorate the room. A well-placed painting, throw rug, decorator pillow, and similar can all enhance the mood without overwhelming occupants.

Also as you start considering what colors to use in your home, consider what each individual room will be used for. What feeling do you want in that room? What do you hope to accomplish?

For example, a bit of yellow in your home office may help with alertness and focus. On the flip side, shades of blue in your bedroom may promote relaxation and rest.

Using Light to Full Benefit

As mentioned previously, light is tied directly into color. However, now we want to turn our attention to sources of light.

Considering how little or how much light to let into your home is an extremely important part of design psychology. Designers know that in general, the more light you let in the better. As such, these experts suggest that big windows and light colors that reflect your sources of light are a must.

Light and lack of light have a big impact on your mental health. S.A.D (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a type of depression that is thought to be caused by not getting sufficient amounts of natural light. People who live in parts of the world where the sun doesn't shine as frequently (like winter in Alaska, U.S.) are more prone to get seasonal affective disorder versus those people who live in places where the sun shines more continuously year-around. As such, those who are in "sun starved" areas are given recommendations to move to more sunny regions of the world if possible...or at the very least do some light therapy during the winter.

So even if you do not outright suffer from seasonal depression due to lack of light in the winter, the light in your home can most definitely have an effect on you.

Yes, it can have a direct impact on your mental health. But it can also have an immediate influence on how you feel in a room. Lots of light opens up a room and makes it feel spacious. Remember how in the beginning of this report we

were talking about how some people may feel trapped in a relationship or job, and it may influence of be influenced by the lack of light in the room? If you think of a dark room and how cramped it feels, you know how much light influences you. A dark room can feel like a rainy day – dreary, exhausting and gloomy.

Note also that your body's sleep/wake cycles are thought to be related to melatonin and light exposure. If you are getting sufficient amounts of light in during the day, it can help regulate your sleep patterns. In the morning if you have your coffee in a room that allows the morning sun to shine in abundantly, you may find that you don't even need the coffee to wake you up, as the sun can take over that job naturally and effectively.

The bottom line that I want to impress upon you: light and color both influence your moods significantly. As such, please give careful consideration to them when you start decorating.

Engaging the Five Senses

What's the first thing most people think of when they start considering how to design their home? That's right, they think about how things will LOOK. Yes, as we've discussed there are some visual elements (such as color and light) that are extremely important when it comes designing your home. However, in order to create an environment that you can really call "home," you need to engage all five senses.

Think about that for a moment. We perceive our world not through one or two senses, but through all five senses (often simultaneously). Consider something as simple as eating an ice cream cone. On first impulse it may seem that we are experiencing the ice cream through taste, but in actuality we are savoring it through all of our senses.

Through touch we feel the cold ice cream on our lips and tongue. We see the colors of the ice cream, and watch them melt together as we sculpt the ice cream with each lick. We can smell the ice cream, the cone, and even the "cold." We hear the "crunch crunch" when we bite into the cone. And yes, we taste it too.

Deliberately removing any one of those senses from the experience diminishes the experience. Likewise, deliberately removing any part of the sensory experience from your home diminishes the overall experience. Even merely neglecting one of the senses can have detrimental effects.

Consider this: let's suppose you have the most beautifully decorated home, so visually appealing that an interior design magazine editor wants to feature it in her magazine. Now suppose that she shows up and the moment she walks through the door she's greeted by the rancid scent of a mouse that's died in between your walls.

Do you suppose she's going to be absolutely captivated by your home? Impressed, maybe. But captivated, no. You see, a rancid odor is able to overcome the visual aspects of your home's design. Your carefully chosen colors and design elements just won't have the right impact if all your guests can do is wonder where the nasty odors are coming from.

Bottom line: attend to and engage all senses in a positive manner!

Now if you are unable to personally experience a particular sensory experience (as the case might be if you are a person who is blind or perhaps deaf), you'll still want to take these things into consideration.

If you enjoy having guests over you'll want to ensure that your entertaining areas include these sensory experiences even if you are unable to enjoy them. For example, if you are a person who lives alone and is deaf, creating an

environment with sounds is not as important in the private areas of your house like your bedroom. But you may want to take “sound decorating” into consideration when you are designing your living room, dining room, kitchen, patio, bathrooms, guest bedrooms, and anywhere else that your household guests may frequent.

Let’s take a look at the five senses and how we can stimulate them with our interior designs...

Sight

Just a moment ago we talked about how a rancid odor can over shadow even the most visually appealing designs. Nonetheless, the visual aspects of your design are some of the most powerful and influencing. Sometimes other sensory experiences work mainly to complement the visual aspect and enhance the overall design...but the visual aspects can very easily be the “core” of your decorating. Your goal is to seek balance with these sensory experiences so that you feel balanced when you’re in your home.

It’s pretty obvious that almost anything that you place in your home will have a visual impact. For example, if you are taking into consideration “sound decorating” and are tossed up between a “sound machine” (that plays sounds of nature) and a mini-fountain, chances are you’ll find the fountain meets both your sound needs plus it is more visually appealing. As such, you need to take sight into consideration even while you are designing for your other senses.

As already discussed, color and light play a major role in the visual aspects of your room. Even the way you let light into the room has an impact, as the visual nature of the room can change not just by how much light is let in, but by what sorts of shadows are created.

For example, you may have a window that lets in a constant amount of light, but the shadows in your home can vary greatly depending on what you place on or in front of that window. You may even choose to place light-catching crystals, stain glass decorations, or other items on the window to create interesting and colorful effects.

Plants, flowers and other vegetation in your house have a visual impact not just by their vibrant colors, but also by their shapes. A sharp cactus or “spiked leaf” plant that looks sharp can create a wholly different environment than rounded-leaf or full, lush vegetation. A few well-placed plants can be used as accents, or you can create a room that feels like a jungle oasis. Both are good ways to connect you to nature and make you feel better.

Indeed, many people find that they feel balanced and relaxed in environments that seem natural. If you can mimic nature by using colors found in nature you will likely feel more relaxed in your home. Think about the greens, blues, oranges, reds and other colors you see when you step out your door. Strive to have your home's interior and outer colors complement the natural setting.

Another issue to consider is the visual impact of your furniture. Your furniture may look good in a magazine, but when you are in the room getting ready to sit down it may or may not "look" inviting. If your sitting room furniture doesn't look inviting, your guests may feel uncomfortable and cut their stay short. For example, consider this: if you have what appears to be antique furniture, your guests may be reluctant to sit on it for fear of "ruining" it.

Another example is if you have white furniture in a white room. This may look elegant and so impress guests. It may also appear like a sterile environment and turn guests off. Or again it may make guests uncomfortable as they have a fear of ruining your room.

You have to ask yourself in this case that is more important to you. Do you want to create an inviting environment? Or would you rather create a "regal" environment (which in turn may cause your guests some discomfort)? And as usual, you must ask yourself how the room makes YOU feel.

The overall feel of your room is often linked to sight. A small room may feel cozy and intimate, or it can feel suffocating. It depends on how you use color, light and accents.

Consider the other elements of your room. A brick wall or "fake stone" wall (often near a fireplace) may seem rustic and relax you. Or it may feel "cold" and uninviting. If that's the case you need to offset that by adding in "softer" visual elements like soft lighting, soft colors, soft looking art-work, soft paintings, soft furniture, soft rugs, soft-looking plants, etc.

Those are just a few examples. However, as already noted the visual impact of your room is affected by everything in the room. The overall feel is going to be greatly influenced by how the room looks.

Sound

Take a moment right now and focus on what you hear. Chances are, it may surprise you. Do you hear a computer humming? Traffic on the street? Birds singing? Your pets or kids playing with toys? People walking around? A commercial on a nearby TV?

Are these enjoyable sounds you hear around you, or does it feel a little like noise pollution?

Often times we tend to “tune out” the sounds that are going on around us, but obviously on some level we are still hearing them. As such, sound is an important design element that affects how we feel in a room as well as how we feel about a room.

As you can tell by the above reference to sound pollution, designing for sound isn't just about adding pleasant sounds... it's also about eliminating noise. Yes, there are some sounds you simply cannot escape, like the sound of traffic if you live near a busy road. However, you can work to shut out some of those sounds by getting more soundproof windows.

The “sound factor” between your various rooms will likely vary greatly. Your living room or family room with its TV, stereo and game console will have a decidedly different feel than a room that you create as a place to mediate or engage in other forms of quiet relaxation. Make sure that the sounds you choose (either adding or doing your best to eliminate outside sounds) match the room.

Some rooms create their own unique sounds, such as the aforementioned family room, or the kitchen with its refrigerator humming, the sounds of something boiling or frying, etc. You can change the feel by changing the sounds. For example, a bustling kitchen can become a peaceful place to enjoy a morning cup of coffee in the summer. All you have to do is hang a wind chime outside the window and open the window when you are ready to transform the room.

Of course this depends on where you live. If opening a window means letting in sound pollution, you may pass on that idea. Or if you live in the peaceful country, you may forgo the wind chime and instead listen to the morning birds in the trees. Enticing birds to your backyard with bird feeders makes for a wonderful visual and auditory treat.

So what types of items can you use to create a pleasant auditory experience? As previously mentioned sound machines are nice, but probably best suited to rooms where they don't detract from the visual impact of the room. You can also consider purchasing CD's that play nature sounds (e.g., the rainforest sounds, or a waterfall, or ocean waves washing up on shore).

Indoor fountains create a gentle natural sound of streaming or tumbling water. You can find these in many decorative catalogs or websites, and certainly at online or offline stores that sell Feng Shui products.

As previously mentioned, wind chimes used right outside an open window can be a wonderful addition to the auditory expression in a room.

The crackling of a fire place can lend a natural, cozy feeling to the room.

Pay attention as well to the acoustics in each room. Rooms with hardwood floors, tile, or other hard surfaces do not absorb sound – instead, sound can “bounce around” the room. If you’d like a quieter room, choose furniture, carpeting, decorative accents and heavy drapes all designed to absorb sound.

Smell (Olfactory Experience)

Smell is another component of your house that is easy to overlook. And just like sound, there are certain rooms that carry their own unique scent (such as the smell of food being made in the kitchen). And also just like sound, sometimes you’ll want to focus on eliminating smells as much as you’ll want to add pleasant olfactory sensations to the environment.

For example, it’s easy for basements to take on wet, musty smells. As another example, laundry rooms often smell like laundry detergent and fabric softener, but if the dirty laundry is allowed to accumulate in the room then it can just as easily smell like dirty laundry.

Entry rooms can take on a variety of smells depending on what people were doing outside before they came in and stripped off their shoes and clothing. A mechanic’s porch or other entry into the house can smell a bit like the auto shop – oily and dirty. A farmer’s entry will likely smell like the farm. Those who live in wet areas may find that their boots, shoes, and outer wear take on a musty odor.

You can change the “smell experience” of these rooms – and in fact all rooms of your house – by eliminating the unpleasant items (e.g., wash dirty clothes frequently instead of letting them pile up) and by adding pleasant odors to the room.

Scented candles, air fresheners, scented oils, incense, potpourri, using sprays on fabrics such as “Febreze,” plants, flowers and other vegetation, and other similar scent enhancers will do wonders for the room. You can even make your own scent enhancer by gently simmering a concoction of water, orange peels, cinnamon, and/or cloves on the stove.

Bonus: burning scented candles not only creates a pleasant scent environment, colored candles, beautiful candle holders, and flickering, dancing flames all contribute to the visual impact of the room.

Tips: baking soda in the refrigerator and in the cat litter pan will help control odors (using scented deodorizing cat litter also works wonders).

Touch

Touch is a component of designing that is also frequently overshadowed by the other aspects, especially sight. However, a room that's designed with touch in mind is a true pleasure to be in.

Consider for example how much impact the type of sheets you put on your bed influence how you feel when you first crawl into bed. On a cold winter night you no doubt enjoy a flannel sheet and a warm comforter. When it's a warm summer night you're likely to prefer a cooler sheet and light blanket. If you're in for a sensual evening, you may prefer to have silk or satin sheets on the bed. Silk sheets on skin provide a wonderful touch sensation.

Obviously your furniture provides an excellent opportunity for you to enhance the touch sensations of the room. You may like the cool feel of smooth leather, or perhaps a textured fabric on a chair. For throw blankets you can do anything from a warm fleece to snuggle under, to a down throw, to the slightly wooly feel of a homemade afghan made of yarn.

The floor is another place to pay attention to the touch sensations, especially if you enjoy walking around in bare feet or even stocking feet. There's definitely a different feel between a cool tile surface and a floor covered in lush carpet versus a floor with a short textured carpet.

For a balanced home, try to attain a variety of surfaces and varying touch sensations.

Taste

Unless you have an unusual habit of licking the surfaces in your home, it's unlikely that you'll be creating a taste experience through the design elements. However, the design elements you choose can greatly enhance your regular taste experiences (e.g., your meals).

Your sense of smell is tied in tightly to your sense of taste. Ever notice how when you get a cold you can't taste your food very well? That's because you can't smell it!

Have you also noticed that when you smell something unpleasant, you can very easily lose your appetite? And likewise, the appropriate pleasant smell can stimulate your appetite.

Keep these facts in mind as you design your home. A kitchen whose pleasant food-making odors are allowed to waft into the dining room helps aid the taste sensations before the meal even begins.

Having a picnic or barbecue outside is another way to enhance the taste sensations in your home. As we've mentioned before, connecting ourselves to nature seems to make us feel better. So it comes as no surprise that eating outdoors can be a very pleasant sensation, so much so that even your food tastes better!

Also as mentioned in the color section of this report, certain colors can have an impact on your taste experiences. Some colors like red and orange enhance appetite (perhaps because they are found in nature, and perhaps because they are stimulating colors). However, "soothing" colors that are at times tied to spoiled food (such as the color blue) can decrease appetite.

If you don't think that this is possible, the next time you serve mashed potatoes to your family put a bit of blue food coloring dye into them. There's a very good chance that your family will eat less of them, and they'll look unappetizing to you, too!

What is Feng Shui and How Does it Apply to Interior Design Psychology?

If you have any interest in interior design psychology you've probably run into the term "Feng Shui" (pronounced fung shway). If you're already well-versed in the "art and science" of applying Feng Shui principles to your living quarters or office, then you can skip this introduction. However, if it's still a mysterious subject to you, then you'll enjoy the following discussion.

First off, what is Feng Shui? Literally the term means "wind and water." Historically it's an ancient Chinese practice of harnessing the best chi (energy) of villages, cities, buildings and home by being very deliberate about the construction, layout and design of these cities and buildings.

In modern times practitioners continue to use Feng Shui at all levels of home design, from construction to decorating. For example, the placement of the front door is important, as is the shape of the home. However, there has been considerable criticism of Feng Shui – some say it's all bunk, some say it's a pseudoscience, and skeptics are put off by developers who want to spend the extra money to use good Feng Shui practices during design and construction.

Indeed, home owners who've heard about Feng Shui typically hire expensive consultants who are self-appointed Feng Shui experts. If they don't hire consultants, then they sometimes learn through books that are written by these same self-appointed experts.

NOTE: This isn't to say that there aren't any good consultants or good books. Just be wary that anyone can write a book or call themselves an expert for the sole purpose of exploiting this area that is gaining popularity. If you're looking for a consultant, it's best to do your research and get references. If you're looking for a book, visit a place like Amazon.com that includes reviews – if the book is "bunk," the reviewers will likely let you know.

So how do Feng Shui experts go about designing the interior of a home? First off, they consult a bagua chart. A bagua chart is used to section off your home into nine distinct sections. Each of these sections corresponds to some aspect of your life, such as wealth, health, family, etc. For example, if you have good chi in the health area of your home, then you are likely to have good health.

Now let's talk about what the bagua chart looks like. If you need a graphic to help you visualize this chart, go to Google.com and type in "bagua chart."

The chart is an eight-sided figure that looks like a United States stop sign. Each of these eight sides corresponds to an aspect of your life, plus the middle of the chart is the 9th aspect. What you need to do is to lay this chart over a sketch of your home so that your home's front door is at the very bottom and center of the

chart (in the “Southern” section of the chart). From there you can break your home up into nine sections.

Let’s start with the front-door (Southern) section of the chart and work clockwise:

South: career
South West: Skills and Knowledge / Wisdom
West: Family
North West: Prosperity / Abundance
North: Fame / Reputation
North East: Love and Relationships
East: Creativity and Children
South East: Travel and Helpful People
Middle of Chart: Health

Ideally you should look at your home as a whole and section it off into these nine divisions. You will also want to extend back into your yard if you have one.

For example, the room or section of your home that is straight ahead as you walk through your front door is your fame and reputation section. It may be one room, or it may be more than one room depending on how your house is designed. Basically this area corresponds to how you wish to be viewed by others, the amount of “power” you have, etc. If you wish to get a better reputation, you would work to enhance this part of your house (more on this in a moment).

Now that you’ve broken up the entire lay of the house (and yard) into the nine Feng Shui sections, you’ll also want to Feng Shui each individual room. In this instance you use the Bagua chart again, just as you did for the entire house. However now you’re paying attention to one room at a time, laying the bagua chart over one room and one room only.

Let’s take a closer look at each of these aspects of your life. The point of this exercise is so that you can better recognize what’s lacking in each part of your life. If you find that you’re not content with certain aspects, then you will really want to pay attention to the corresponding sections of your house by adding “cures” or enhancements. For example, if you’re in ill health then you will want to make sure the center of your home (which corresponds to the health area on the bagua chart) has good chi.

Below are the descriptions of each aspect of your life, plus the color and element associated with these sections. Color is important to know because you will want to place these colors in the parts of your home corresponding to these sections. Likewise, placing items in your home representing the corresponding elements is also beneficial.

For example, if you wanted to improve the career area of your life, you'd place items that represent career's element (water) in the corresponding area of your home. For example, perhaps you'd have a water fountain near your front door.

Career: If you want a job, want better working conditions at your job, or are considering switching jobs or career, pay attention to this area. Associated color is black. Associated element is water.

Skills / Knowledge: The skills and knowledge aspect can apply to all areas where you want to gain wisdom – whether you want to know more about yourself, get good grades in school, get job-related skills, or even grow your relationship skills. Associated color is blue. Associated element is water.

Family: The family and foundation section relates to feeling more secure in your family, improving your relationship with family members, and even improving your sex life. Associated color is green. Associated element is wood.

Prosperity: The prosperity and abundance section is primarily concerned with money – whether you need more money, you want better control of your money, or you want to be satisfied with what you have. The associated color is purple. Associated element is fire.

Fame and Reputation: This section is concerned with how people view you, whether you want to develop a good reputation (or develop a better one than you already have), or if you want to become well-known for something. The associated color is red. Associated element is fire.

Relationship and Love: This section is about finding and developing good relationships and marriages. The associated color is pink. Associated element is fire.

Creativity and Children: This section relates to everything dealing with your children, or you wanting to feel younger, or you want to have more creativity in your life. The associated color is white. Associated element is metal.

Helpful People and Travel: This section relates to moving and traveling, and finding people to help you with things. For example, if you feel like things don't

get done unless you do them yourself, focus on improving the chi in this section of your home. The associated color is silver. Associated element is water.

Health: Health refers both to mental and physical health. You can also improve the chi of this section if you are working on a problem that doesn't quite fit into any other section. The associated color is yellow. Associated element is earth.

Now stop and think about these areas of your life. What would you like to improve? Whichever seems most urgent to you is what you should start working on first in your home.

Now for the next big question: how do you "fix" or "cure" these areas of your home so that you can enhance these areas of your life?

This is where a Feng Shui consultant or a book that goes into detail will help you out. This isn't something that we can cover in this report as there are many Feng Shui "rules" that you must be aware of (for example, close toilet lids so that your good chi isn't literally "flushed down the toilet").

Most often you'll see consultants enhancing and redirecting the chi in a room by careful placement of mirrors, wind chimes, water fountains, windmill type items, etc. The colors and elements corresponding to each aspect of the nine sections is important. For example, if you want to improve the health section of your home you'd place yellow items in the center of your home, as well as items representing the earth (such as a plant). A yellow flower would do the trick too.

Now while a consultant or a good book on the topic can definitely help you enhance each section of the room, you must be involved in the design as well. Some say that Feng Shui can work even if you don't quite understand it. However, you can make it even more powerful when you DO understand it and when you work to consciously enhance aspects of your life. It's as if you focusing with deliberate intention on some aspect of your life begins to manifest itself in reality. That's powerful.

For example, the love and marriage corner of your house has the associated color pink and the associated element is fire. As such, you may want to place a pair of pink candlesticks in that section of your house (and in corresponding sections of individual rooms). Feng Shui consultants would mostly agree with this placement because you are incorporating the color, the element and you are symbolically representing a relationship (two people) by placing a pair of items together.

However, willy nilly placing a pair of pink candlesticks in a room isn't going to solve all your marriage and love problems. You must also place them there with great intention. The candle sticks – or whatever you choose – must represent love and marriage to YOU. When you look at them you must be reminded of the type of love and/or marriage you are seeking.

For example, some people place two swans in their marriage corner, since they view swans as having strong relationships since they mate for life. If this doesn't mean much to you, then perhaps you want to include something like a picture of you and your spouse at a time you were extremely happy...in doing so, you are reinforcing that this is the type of relationship you want to maintain.

Remember in the beginning of this report we talked about how changes in your home (such as cramped living quarters and lack of light) can affect your life? This theory is in full force when you start to apply Feng Shui techniques to your home. Even the very act of consciously focusing on a section of your home that corresponds to an aspect of your life can create powerful changes in your life.

For example, clutter is not considered to bring good chi in any section of your home. If you clear away the clutter, you are inviting fresh and positive chi into your life.

Let me give you a different sort of example: let's suppose that you have one car and a two-car garage. Because you've only had one car for so long, you've started to fill up the second stall with clutter. It may even be overwhelming to think about cleaning up all the clutter.

Now suppose you want a second car or perhaps something like a boat to put in that second stall of your garage. In its current state, there simply isn't any room. You probably won't even seriously consider getting that boat or second car until you clean up the clutter. Sure, you may think you want that other vehicle, but on some level you are resisting it because you haven't made room for it in your life. Clean out the stall, and you will be amazed at how quickly you acquire that other vehicle.

Another example is if you are looking for love and perhaps a marriage. Is there room in your life? For example, do you sleep in a small bed with all your pets? If so, it's difficult to imagine another person in bed next to you, isn't it? It's just not a very inviting scenario. While you may think you want love or marriage, it's more likely to find you if you make room in your life.

In short – if you want to make changes in your life, make room for these changes! Declutter your home. Attract good chi by enhancing sections of your home with items that have meaning to you and that represent wealth, love, career and more. You'll be amazed at how fast your life changes when you start changing around a few things in your home!