

Feng Shui & Ferrets

Believe it or not, this age-old art can be beneficial for ferrets and their owners.

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These days, it seems as though feng shui is showing up in all kinds of places. Not too long ago the majority of people couldn't even pronounce the term, but now feng shui (pronounced fung shway) is being used in large corporations, real estate, architecture, construction and just about anywhere people feel the need for it.

That hasn't always been the case. Even though feng shui has been around for thousands of years, it is considered a fairly recent addition to Western culture.

"Feng shui started with Chinese farmers who found that where they placed their farms determined whether they thrived or survived," said Carol Olmstead, who has been featured in a number of publications, including *Cosmopolitan* and *The Washington Post*, owns *Feng Shui for Real Life* in Bethesda, Md. and Santa Fe, N.M., and authored *The Feng Shui Quick Guide*. "As civilizations became more urbanized, feng shui became adapted to how people were living."

And to adapt to how people live, feng shui has evolved to include many different schools and forms. Because of this, the amount of information available on feng shui may not only be overwhelming, but downright baffling.

"If you go to Amazon.com and type in feng shui, there are over 1,200 books and it is rather confusing," Olmstead said.

"There are a lot of things called feng shui, but in reality there is only one feng shui," said Chris Shaul, a senior instructor and webmaster for the American Feng Shui Institute.

Feng shui is the study of the environment and how it affects living things. The ways in which practitioners deal with this has resulted in different schools and methods.

The good news is that most experts agree most methods have the same roots. "I would say that it all works, it doesn't matter what school you're working with," said Margaret Donahue, co-author of *Dorm Room Feng Shui* and owner of *Feng Shui Connections* in Windham, N.H. "All feng shui is really rooted in all basic principles."

Mary Ann Russell, owner of *Complete Feng Shui Solutions* in Huntington Beach, Calif., summed up the different approaches with an analogy. "It's like taking a tai chi, karate or yoga class from someone who studies it versus a community center. The community center just has a different, Westernized view."

While many people still may not understand the details when it comes to feng shui, the practice itself is not a new concept.

"When somebody says they don't believe in feng shui, it's like saying they don't believe in air or gravity," said Cathleen McCandless, who has served as a consultant for many worldwide organizations, including Intel and Nike, and owns *San Diego Feng Shui* in La Jolla, Calif. "Feng shui is the study of the environment and how it affects living things. It has been around since time began."

Feng Shui & Your Ferret

Because feng shui affects living things it can translate to ferrets. However, it wasn't always considered that way. In terms of classical feng shui, ferrets may not have had a place.

"In old China, people were not concerned about animals in feng shui," Shaul said. "However, here in the West, we often get requests to assist people and their animals."

Living things are important in feng shui. "All living things contain energy, so placing living things, such as plants, fish and pets in our environment, adds energy to that space," said Stephanie Bish, a feng shui consultant in Ely, Minn. "Specifically, happy, healthy pets are going to enhance the positive energy flow of a home."

The key words are happy, healthy pets. Pets that are not happy and healthy can create problems in the home and for the

owners. Enhancing the positive energy flow in the home and for the inhabitants is often referred to as enhancing chi. Chi, or energy, is the same for our pets. "Each pet has its own nature, but how the chi or the energy of a space affects them is the same as humans," Shaul said.

"The better chi we have around us affects our environment, and our environment is a reflection of what is going on inside of us," said Lynne Greene, who has provided expertise to organizations such as Nordstrom and Discovery Channel and owns Feng Shui Eyes in McLean, Va. "The better the environment is, the better we will be internally; and internal, external, yin and yang, it's all connected."

In order to create positive chi, balance must exist. Balance can be obtained many ways. Some include working with the yin and yang or by exploring the five elements in feng shui, which include fire, earth, metal, water and wood. "That's one thing that is fairly consistent. When these elements are in balance around you, things feel better," Olmstead said.

Many practitioners agree that bringing balance to our ferrets involves common sense. A clean living area, uncluttered space, fresh food and water, and a place for toys all have positive effects on ferrets. Create a comfortable environment for your ferrets by looking through their eyes.

"Look around and see what your pet sees," Donahue said. "Is it pleasant, is it balanced, is the chi free flowing or are they stuffed off in a dark corner somewhere?"

Make sure your ferrets feel like part of the family through interaction. Look to what the pet sees every day. Look at the world on their level, and get rid of sharp corners, dangerous electrical places, and things that aren't safe.

Ferret-proofing must be increased for any ferret owner who allows their pet free-roam privileges. Owners may be surprised to learn that, in terms of feng shui, ferret-proofing the home is not only good for the ferret, it is healthy for humans as well.

"It really comes down to the psychological impact," Russell said. "If you have high anxiety or if you're concerned every time your ferret is going to get out, then you're extending your own resources for something you can't manage or is a hassle to manage, and that can be a problem."

According to feng shui practitioners, balancing your needs and the ferrets' needs along with the space enhances chi. For many ferret owners, their main concern for their ferrets is safety.

Interestingly enough, some people consider safety to be at the core of feng shui. "Animals instinctively practice feng shui and the basic core truth for all feng shui is safety," McCandless said. "So when you feel safe, you feel more comfortable; and when you feel comfortable you're happy."

McCandless says one of the ways animals instinctively practice safety, and therefore feng shui, is when they sleep. When animals curl up to go to sleep, they almost always back up against something, because the animal knows not to leave its back unprotected.

"So for the animal kingdom, they want a place they can feel safe, that they can hide or their own place where they feel safe or can completely relax," she said. "And everything else revolves out of that."

Cage Placement

Having a practitioner come in and evaluate a home or business in terms of feng shui is a very individual experience.

"If you lived in a house for a year and a person moved in and wanted to feng shui it, your environment would probably be different from theirs because it's your needs, life, energy — and your energy is unique to you," said Shelley Deegan, owner of fengshuiinteriors.com who practices in San Diego and Seattle. "Things also change in regard to organization or placement if you have one ferret, if you have two, if you have three."

When it comes to specifics, there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula regarding how to place a ferret's cage, but you should take some general rules into consideration. "The first guideline is the health of the animal," Deegan said. "So if a ferret needs X amount of darkness, that's the first guideline. Keep the health in balance and everything else comes after that."

Some practitioners suggest a cage in the children/creativity area would be beneficial (see bagua chart.) Still others suggest if ferrets are your business or apply to your career, to consider putting the cage in the self/career/work area.

However, some people believe that certain areas should be avoided. “Bedrooms are for rest for children and romance for adults,” Olmstead said. “I don’t prefer cages in there.”

“I would not recommend placing a cage that contains animal waste near or within direct view of the food preparation or serving area,” Bish said. “Beyond that, it would be wise to analyze the needs of the residents of the home and use the bagua to formulate the best plan for placement.”

When it comes to the cage itself, make sure that it meets the ferret’s needs. The cage should be clean, able to support the animal and be comfortable. Also, make sure it is the right size. If the cage is too large or too small, it can have an adverse affect.

“Think about walking into a very large home with only one or two people living there,” Shaul said. “It feels cold and uninviting. It’s the same, too, if you have a big family in a small house. Avoid extremes and find the balance.”

In all aspects, feng shui is about balance and should be heavily considered in terms of cage placement. “Do not choose anywhere where there is an imbalance. Too hot or too cold is not preferred. Too bright or too dark is also not good,” Shaul said.

Cleanliness is also an issue. “If the cages are dirty and you are rarely cleaning them, that’s not good energy you’re bringing into your household,” Olmstead said.

Ferret Quirks

Because all things have a place in feng shui, one tends to wonder how the ferrets’ penchant to steal items from around the house and hide them affects chi.

“Yes, everything has a place, but feng shui is about movement,” Olmstead said. “It’s moving energy so the more you move things the more you’re bringing energy, chi, into your life.”

That’s good news for ferret owners. Ferrets rearranging, stealing and hiding items is a positive trait — unless this behavior makes the owner unhappy.

“They are probably trying to have some fun and really engaged in interaction and that definitely helps with the chi,” Donahue said. “If the owners get mad, then that will bring up issues in the owner.” However most owners probably realize that the ferrets are probably trying to have fun and liven it up.

Owners can encourage and contribute to their ferret’s sense of adventure. “If anything, I would put things out for them to rearrange instead of fighting it,” Deegan said. “That’s what feng shui is really about: dealing with the flow of things in the room.”

“They’re creating their sacred space and they like these things and they’re going to put it in a spot that they believe is their spot,” Greene said. “They’re moving the chi to better suit their environment. They do things for a reason or to give them comfort.”

Again, meeting an animal’s needs promotes good feng shui. “From a feng shui point of view, you need to provide those materials that would make them feel like they could respond to their natural instincts and that will instinctively make your ferret happy,” McCandless said.

Once all of the different methods, forms, styles and information are simplified, the practice of feng shui is largely about creating balance and bringing positive, free-flowing energy into people’s lives.

“There can be a concept about it being some goofy superstition,” McCandless said. That couldn’t be farther from the truth. “The purity is just creating a wonderful, relaxing, comfortable environment.”

And that is something all ferrets are entitled to.

Find An Expert

Because there are many different schools and forms of feng shui, it is important to research the consultant who will be the right fit for you and your home. In *The Everything Feng Shui Book*, Katina Z. Jones, suggests some questions to ask potential consultants:

1. How long has the consultant been practicing feng shui?
2. Does he or she have a feng shui degree or other relevant certification?
3. What individual, school, or program taught the consultant, and how many years did the consultant study?
4. Does the consultant continue to take classes or pursue other kinds of continuing education in feng shui?
5. What general philosophy and school of feng shui does the consultant lean toward — Form, Compass or Black Hat Sect.