



REBECCA ROTH-THE FEDERAL PAPER

Sara Schroerlucke, Feng Shui expert, at work in an IRS building.

## *IRS Official, Feng Shui Expert, Says Oval Office Has Poor 'Chi'*

By A.B. STODDARD

Inside the corner cubicle belonging to IRS official Sara Schroerlucke, a small green elephant lies on its side next to her telephone, looking ... well, dead. Everything else in her Oxon Hill workspace — the calendar of breathtaking vistas at Sedona, the bamboo plants, the statue of Buddha — clearly has been placed with precision.

And, as it turns out, so has Mr. Elephant.

"The elephant who puts his ear to the ground hears for miles and miles," explains Schroerlucke, a soft-spoken and petite brunette. In addition to managing a multimillion dollar information technology project for the federal government, the Alexandria, Va., resident is a cer-

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# Energy, Productivity and Serenity: Feng Shui

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tified practitioner of Feng Shui, the ancient Chinese art of placement.

Wacky? Maybe. But Schroerlucke isn't alone in her quest to find ways to make federal workspaces more inviting. Once inconceivable in buttoned-down Washington, Feng Shui (pronounced "fung shway") is slowly gaining currency as hardworking federal employees decide that something more than the boss and the daily grind are making them feel tired and negative.

For example, it doesn't take a Feng Shui master to conclude that most of the federal buildings in the nation's capital are spiritually draining. Step outside the lushly appointed suites of Cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries, and the workspaces of most federal employees border on oppressive.

In the interest of fiscal discipline, many federal buildings have not been upgraded in decades. They tend to be poorly lit dungeons with cramped floor plans, poor ventilation, clutter, cubicles, narrow hallways and low ceilings. At Treasury's headquarters, employees and news reporters stationed in the building complain of cockroaches year-round and rats that emerge in the winter.

In this stifling environment the practice of Feng Shui is finding a receptive audience, particularly in the months since the jarring events of Sept. 11 forced many to



PHOTOS BY REBECCA ROTH-THE FEDERAL PAPER

The exterior of the IRS Building in Oxon Hill, Md., has a modern outside look. Inside it resembles a typical federal office building.

reassess their personal lives. Schroerlucke, a 22-year veteran of the federal government, is drawing larger groups of colleagues to her brown-bag lunches and has seen a surge in her consulting business since January. Federal workers — men as well as women — are expressing more interest in Feng Shui.

"People have become more aware of their surroundings — of family, of harmony and finding balance in life," says Schroerlucke, who runs the Washington Metro Chapter of the International Feng Shui Guild. "They're not looking for a lot of wealth. It's more that they want to be in

alignment with the earth and to be able to balance work and home to bring more peace into their lives."

Schroerlucke claims that in the few months since she learned the elephant trick from a Feng Shui master, the animal's resting place between her phone and her computer has already improved not only how she listens to other people — but also how they listen to her.

## Balance and Harmony

Feng Shui, a practice dating back thousands of years in China, is based on the

belief that one's environment should be in balance and harmony with nature. Ideally, human surroundings should be healthy channels for energy, or chi, the universal life force and should balance the complementary forces of yin and yang.

Like many Eastern traditions, Feng Shui was rediscovered and propagated by the West Coast's arbiters of hip. When the fad caught on more than a decade ago in southern California, some of its wealthier followers even abandoned costly home deposits when their Feng Shui consultants warned that healthy chi energy couldn't stand a chance in their dream homes.

But federal workers are finding that — stripped of California excess — the principles of Feng Shui can improve their daily work lives.

Federal buildings, Schroerlucke says, suffer from "horrible ventilation" and the offensive odors emanating from fabric partitions dividing cubicles are a cause for sleepiness. Glare from fluorescent light is too strong, she adds, causing too much yang energy thus creating irritability and disharmony. Lack of proper filing space causes clutter, which saps chi and results in low productivity.

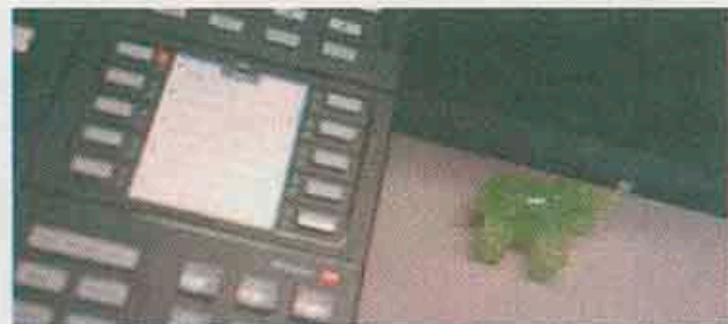
But doorless and ceilingless cubicles — which don't allow chi to flow around a desk and typically put the worker's back to the door — represent the most significant breach of Feng Shui principles in government offices.

"In the average federal building the chi is very confined," says Schroerlucke. "The furniture has a lot to do with this. The cubicles can be stifling and stop the flow of energy, depending on their configuration."

Schroerlucke managed to reposition her computer so that she could see the door, though she doesn't directly face it. Having one's back to the door scatters personal energy, leading to feelings of being unsettled, she says.

## 'Definition of Luck'

Glenda Harbin, also of the IRS, works in a cubicle on a corner of a hallway. The relentless traffic is interrupted only by people that stop by or threaten to. They call over the wall and say they hear the noise of her typing. She has organized her clutter and personalized her space with photographs but can't reposition her desk. As a result, she says, she always feels rushed.



Top photo: Sara Schroerlucke's workspace shows three Feng Shui values: power (the dragon), prosperity and good luck (bamboo). Lower left: The elephant with its ear to the ground helps her listen. Lower right: Sara's boss has a tranquil fountain and objects of importance to him to develop Feng Shui.





This Zen garden is one idea that Sara Schroerlucke suggests using at work.

"It's very distracting," says Harbin, a resident of Chesapeake Beach, Md. "It makes me feel a higher level of stress. I always feel like someone is walking up behind me, and I am going to have to react."

Schroerlucke says that practicing Feng Shui brought her better health, an improved sense of peace — and a promotion to her job as chief of business development and management at TIPPS Branch (Treasury Information Processing Support Services). Now an author and speaker, Schroerlucke stumbled upon Feng Shui five years ago by accident.

A book at a favorite local shop in Occoquan, Va., fell into her lap. Considering herself an open-minded person, she read it. Schroerlucke, a native of Las Vegas who has lived in the area for 22 years, decided to hire a Feng Shui consultant to assess her Manassas, Va., home because she was feeling "stuck." Despite 18 years of service in the federal government, and a master's degree, Schroerlucke was still a GS-13 and feeling left off the promotion ladder.

It took the removal from her living room of a favorite statue of Hamlet holding Yorick's skull — representing death — to rapidly improve Schroerlucke's circumstances and make her a believer. She followed other Feng Shui principles and is now a GS-15.

Her skeptical husband became a believer after his own promotion, a subsequent improvement in the couples' finances and Sara's recovery from some nagging health problems.

Learning the art of Feng Shui and starting to make even small changes "gets you

into action," Schroerlucke says. "And with the action and intent, it starts putting everything into place. It's like your definition of luck."

### Not Magic or a Religion

Co-workers chide her with names such as "Yoda" or "New Ager," but they also seek out the notable tranquility of her office and her advice. Even her boss has been sold.

John Ely, director of technical contract management in the Office of Procurement, positioned his desk so that he saw the door and added several Feng Shui enhancements to his corner office including more photographs of his family, a small fountain and a Zen sand garden that promotes relaxation focus.

Ely says he considers Schroerlucke a "straightforward, results-oriented person," and was impressed with the results she told him she has had with commercial businesses she has advised.

"I knew right off the bat the results would be tangible in a business environment," said Ely. "She's never been one to exaggerate benefits."

Despite his characterization of himself as a "nuts-and-bolts, black-and-white kind of person," who originally found Feng Shui a "soft topic," Ely says he believes Schroerlucke's advice has already made a difference.

"The Zen garden on my conference table has actually helped relax people and contributed to successful business conversations," he said. In fact Ely, whose office was supposed to be temporary, has asked to stay there.

"I feel comfortable and effective here," he says. "And the advice on how to set up the office has had a lot to do with that."

While Schroerlucke believes in the power of Feng Shui and the impact that unhealthy chi has on lives, she is eager to dispel the notion that Feng Shui is a religion.

"Feng Shui is not a religion," she says. "Religion is man-made. Feng Shui is not a superstition and not a philosophy. It is a practice."

And Feng Shui isn't magic, she adds. Good Feng Shui in the office is not a replacement for hard work and a positive attitude.

With all her clients, Schroerlucke offers this disclaimer: "There is no timeline and there are no guarantees."

E-mail: [astoddard@fedpaper.com](mailto:astoddard@fedpaper.com)



Schroerlucke says Bush should reposition his desk with his back against a wall and surround himself with symbols of strength, compassion, motivation and wisdom.

## Bush Has It Backwards

President Bush might consider placing an elephant next to his phone.

According to the principles of Feng Shui, the president experiences trouble getting people to listen to him because the Oval Office suffers from poor Feng Shui.

Unfortunately for the nation's boss, and his predecessors, the president sits with his back to the window, robbing him of essential "chi," or energy, which diminishes support for administration policies. There are also too many doors in the Oval Office, providing multiple escapes for chi.

Schroerlucke recommends that Bush reposition his desk with his back against a wall. She also recommends that he surround himself with symbols of strength, compassion, motivation and wisdom.

In fact, the Feng Shui of the entire White House suffers due to the cascading roof lines pointed at it from buildings on surrounding streets.

But the Treasury Department — just next door on 15th St. NW — is located in a curve of space, preferable under Feng Shui principles, and the buildings across the street have rectangular rooflines of the same height.

Despite Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill's decision to introduce more cubicles in senior offices to facilitate teamwork, Schroerlucke says the building's executive offices have good Feng Shui.

The Pentagon, where Schroerlucke spent most of her government service, has poor Feng Shui because of its five-sided design. According to the Chinese, five is the worst energy number, representing misfortune.

Schroerlucke, who used to work in the southwest portion of the building that was rammed by a hijacked jet Sept. 11 — and lost friends in the terrorist attack — mentions this, but is reluctant to expand on it because of the enormous loss caused by the attack.

— A.B. STODDARD

## Motivate, Energize and Focus With These Feng Shui Tips

Anyone can improve their own personal space by cleaning, personalizing and rearranging their workspace, says Schroerlucke.

"I tell people when they first move in to really clean it up," she says. "Clean the surfaces and get rid of whatever energy imprints are there. It's important to make it your space."

"Then people should surround themselves with things that will motivate them, energize them and keep them focused."

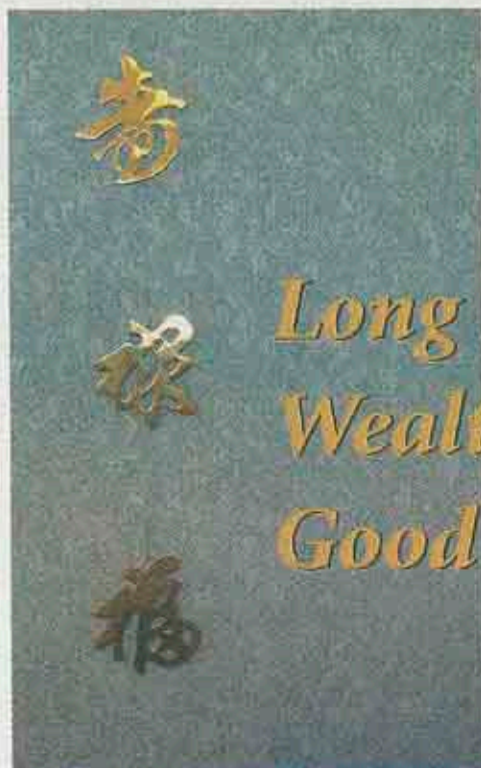
Tips to get started:

- Clear your desk and office of clutter. Get rid of excess paper and don't place important documents on the floor.
- Plants and flowers are excellent chi enhancers because they attract energy. Pictures of nature can also provide a connection to the outdoors.
- Avoid sitting with your back to the door. Make sure you can see — either directly or from an angle — who is entering your office or cubicle. Try to have a wall behind you.
- Try to create some empty space in front of your desk to allow

healthy chi flow.

- Try not to sit under exposed beams or to face anything sharp. The best position for a desk is on a diagonal, directly opposite the entrance.
- To increase recognition in your organization, display awards, certificates or diplomas.
- Keep a lamp in the darkest corner of your desk. Natural light is preferable to artificial light, so if overhead fluorescent light can be turned off, a combination of sunlight and lamplight is best.
- Wear or feature the colors purple and red to boost confidence and authority. According to Feng Shui principles, colors represent the elements in nature. Red and purple (yang colors) provide for a stronger presence. Black represents water and is associated with finances.
- Music should be used in the office if it serves to calm and energize the psyche of the individual. Schroerlucke prefers quiet and only listens to music at home.
- The use of fountains in the office is also good for some people and not for others. Should the sound of a fountain prove soothing and useful, place it in the east, north or southeast part of the room.

— A.B. STODDARD



Long Life  
Wealth  
Good Luck