



The Feng Shui of Choosing a Home

By Charles Shahar

Buildings come in various shapes and sizes, and are situated in many different places. If you are interested in the quality of a dwelling and want to identify a place where the atmosphere is fresh and vital there are certain important factors to consider. In this article, I will assume that you have heard of the concept of ch'i, which in Chinese philosophy is the life force, the vital energy. It can be found in food, sunshine, in our bodies; in fact, it permeates all of nature. However, ch'i can be more constricted in some place than others.

According to the discipline of feng shui, there are specific shapes of houses that are more conducive for promoting ch'i, such as square or rectangular ones. In both cases, there are no odd angles, and symmetry is generally considered good for the flow of vital energy.¹ However, if a rectangular house is extremely narrow it may constrict ch'i levels. An L-shaped configuration for a house or apartment building is not desirable, because the flow of ch'i is deflected at the bend.² A house that is shaped in an irregular fashion will also be less vital, because the energy flow is more convoluted.

The direction that a house faces is also critical. Houses that face in a southern or easterly direction generally have a more favorable disposition of ch'i because they have more exposure to sunlight, and are thus generally more invigorated. Houses that face in a northerly direction have fronts that are often shaded, and they tend to be more dark and gloomy inside as well. Large back windows and a prominent back entrance can compensate somewhat.

Buildings located at or near industrial zones, heavily commercial areas, close to the city center, or near busy highways, railroads, airports, and bridges will generally have constricted levels of ch'i.³ It is not desirable to live around a busy street intersection, as the vital energy is often thin there. Simply living by the side of a busy road, where there is often traffic congestion, means that the ch'i will not have a chance to settle. If the street is choked with car exhaust, is lined with tall buildings, and reinforced with little greenery, the occupants will have to work hard to keep their indoor spaces fresh and vital.

A modest-size house that is surrounded by much larger buildings, even just on one side, will be oppressed as far as levels of ch'i are concerned. If, looking through the window of such a house, the next building significantly blocks your view, you can be assured that it is ch'i-constricted.⁴ Such a house is lying in the shadow of its neighbors. In terms of ch'i obstructions from other buildings, it is even worse if there is a huge building in front of your house (than beside or behind it).⁵ A large hill towering in front of your home can also obstruct the flow of ch'i.⁶

Feng shui authority Donna Stellhorn suggests that if a neighbor's house is at least twice as large as yours, it will have an impact on the disposition of ch'i in your dwell-

ing.⁷ She also defines the amount of space needed for a smaller house not to be affected. Specifically, a house is significantly affected if the distance to its larger neighbor is less than the latter's height.⁸ In other words, if the larger building fell on its side and crossed your property, then you are losing ch'i in your living space.⁹

In choosing a home, I tend to rely on intuition rather than precise measurement. When I was house shopping once, I looked out the bedroom window to find that the neighboring apartment building took over the entire view, with just a small alleyway separating the structures. I had a claustrophobic feeling, and could only breathe freely once I exited the premises. Any smaller house located immediately to the side of a large apartment or office building will have this problem. This is particularly true if the larger building casts a permanent shadow on the smaller unit, thereby blocking sunlight, and preventing ch'i from circulating freely around the periphery of the house.

The Ch'i Disposition of Apartment Buildings

Within apartment buildings, the lower floors generally have less ch'i circulating than the upper ones, mostly because less sunlight reaches them. According to feng shui expert Sarah Rossbach, the lower floors are oppressed by the weight of the higher floors, and the large buildings surrounding them, which cause a constriction of ch'i.¹⁰ They are also more susceptible to the effects of traffic pollution and noise. The energy levels of apartments in high-rises tend to be more vibrant several floors above the ground, although they are still compromised by the generally stagnant atmosphere surrounding a larger city.

Apartment buildings deficient in ch'i generally have a dark aura about them, a bleakness that makes them unattractive beyond just their appearance. Once inside, the air seems heavy, reflected by the way odors (particularly cooking smells) float about for long periods before dissipating. Even if there is sufficient lighting, the place may seem quite dim. For a sensitive person tuned into the subtle dimension, walking through the corridors is akin to passing through a kind of fog. Such an atmosphere will not seem remarkable to the people who reside there, since their sensibilities will gradually dull to such conditions.

There are a few more considerations related to the dispositions of ch'i in apartment buildings. Long, narrow corridors restrict the flow of ch'i, particularly if they do not have any windows and are dimly lit.¹¹ Apartment units at the end of long corridors often have less ch'i coming through the front door, and every effort should be made to get fresh air by opening windows or balcony doors instead. Poor maintenance in the entrance and hallways of apartment buildings (old and stained carpets, floors rarely washed, dull or peeling paint) will likewise sig-

nificantly affect the flow of ch'i.¹² Finally, it is preferable if the entryway to the building is spacious rather than narrow or cramped, to allow an adequate inflow of ch'i.

Basements are the worst places for ch'i, and their vital fields are often heavily constricted.¹³ The lack of freshly circulating air and natural lighting is a problem, as well as the fact that the heaviest elements generally sink toward the bottom of an edifice, whereas the more rarefied elements float upward. (As mentioned above, ch'i will thus be more concentrated in the upper floors.) The more subterranean the residence, the more stale and heavy the air will be. A semi-basement will have a better disposition of ch'i, but will still be impacted by the traffic and commotion at street level.

Ch'i and Green Space

It is critical to have at least some green space around a house. A dwelling surrounded by bushes and grass will generally have more ch'i permeating it than one with sparse vegetation around it. The vital auras of trees envelop the areas in their vicinity, and even one tree on a property can make a huge difference in terms of the energetic disposition of a house. Trees and bushes expel loads of ch'i into the atmosphere, and it always pains me to see trees felled. However, sunlight should still be able to penetrate sufficiently through the windows and doors. A house whose front is perpetually in the shade because it is blocked by trees will be ch'icompromised.

Buildings whose entrances lead almost directly into the road, and those surrounded by only asphalt and concrete, often have constricted levels of ch'i. Where there is no lawn or garden between a house and street, a much thinner envelope of ch'i will surround it. There will often be a cold, lifeless quality inside the building as well, unless its owners take steps to energize it. Plenty of indoor plants will vitalize such an atmosphere effectively, particularly if they are kept in good condition.

A front lawn that is ill maintained and overrun by weeds will siphon off vitality from the area around it. A house surrounded by a bare or sparse lawn will lack luster in the vital field. It is important from a ch'i perspective that the front lawn not be littered with clutter or debris, and that plants be kept healthy rather than dead or dying.¹⁴ Front gardens where dead flowers have not been removed tend to depress the vital field around them. Wendy Hobson, notes that tangled undergrowth in a garden can accumulate stagnant energy as much as clutter in a house.¹⁵

More Ch'i Considerations

There are other considerations for promoting ch'i in homes and buildings. Courtyards are desirable because they focus ch'i in a central area, and provide a connection with nature and the elements. On the other hand, if most of the courtyard area is dark or shaded, it will defeat the purpose of this configuration. Any large area around a house that is permanently shaded will also compromise its disposition of ch'i, particularly at the front part of the property.

Ivies or other climbing plants along the sides of houses provide a vital sheath that helps to energize and protect

the dwelling. On the other hand, the windows should not be covered by these vines, to allow sunlight to easily stream in.¹⁶ If these creepers overrun a house, they may siphon off vital energy or ch'i from inside the dwelling.¹⁷

The entrance to a house should be clear and not obstructed, so as not to impede the inflow of ch'i. A large entrance is always preferable to a small, narrow one. The front door should lead into a spacious area that is not blocked by walls or columns.¹⁸ A narrow lobby will choke the ch'i entering the house. Main entrances that are located on the side of the house are often more constrictive than those at the front.

The interior should be amply exposed to the ambient ch'i of the outdoors. This can be accomplished through large windows, particularly if light is coming through on two sides of a major room, such as a den or living room. Large balconies are also desirable, preferably facing the sunlit side. Skylights are an excellent way to allow light to penetrate a house. Fireplaces are also a great way to increase the levels of ch'i of a home.

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