



INTERIORS

Bliss this house

The right design can create a feeling of well-being and harmony in the home, writes **Peta Tomlinson**

It's not unusual to walk into someone's home and admire how it looks. What's not so easy to achieve is an interior scheme that "just feels right". The key is to create harmony – a tenet of good design.

New Zealand-born designer Georgie Inglis achieves it through feng shui. Her premise is that the home is where the heart lies in a family, so it is important to promote harmony by ensuring the flow of positive energy in the right places, and reducing or eliminating negative energy.

It might not be immediately obvious to the eye but in the Inglis' Pok Fu Lam home, objects, art, colours and the even placement of furniture play a role in achieving harmony through feng shui. "Often, visitors to our home make comments such as 'your apartment has a great feel to it', and I believe much of this is because of the flow of positive energy," she says.

Building on her design background, Inglis graduated from Hong Kong's Raymond Lo School of Feng Shui in 2008, basing her business, Zeaki, on its principles. When all the elements are in harmony, she says, your home space "will be calm, restful and inviting, making a perfect retreat from the constant stimulus of daily life in Hong Kong."

In addition to feng shui, Inglis says harmony is enhanced in ways that include creating a cosy corner



Objects, art, colour and furniture placement play a role in achieving harmony through feng shui in Georgie Inglis' home (top); avoid clutter by using one statement piece (above) and a strong colour, as Lu Kou has done (below), to link everything up. Photos: Oliver Tsang

People can sense when a space is not designed well, before it is decorated

Georgie Inglis, designer



Tips to help you glow with the flow

Designer Georgie Inglis (right), founder of Zeaki, offers these tips for achieving harmony through feng shui:

- An uncluttered, personalised and organised space is essential. A room should "feel peaceful as soon as you enter it".
- A spring clean is a fantastic cleanser. Do this at least twice a year to coincide with changes in season.
- Adequate storage. There is nothing better than being able to find something with ease. Ikea and Muji provide great storage solutions at affordable prices.
- Depending on your element, gain support from associated colours. For



example, a fire person needs red, orange, pink and purples. Achieve this through paint, art or soft furnishings.

- Plants bring a slice of nature inside, have a calming effect and clean the air. They can also be used to partition an entrance and stop positive energy flowing out of a window or door.
- Furniture and ornaments should be placed to receive positive energy and allow it to flow easily through a space.
- Emphasise the things you love: spotlight art, hide electrical cords, display books, photos and prized possessions.

Peta Tomlinson

"where you can put your feet up and read, reflect or listen to music", choosing relaxing paint colours and opting for soft, ambient lighting from lamps and candles.

Designer Lu Kou, founder of Kou Concept, agrees there should be a happy balance between a room looking beautiful, and feeling just right. "It is very important that it's peaceful." She says no single thing will cut it. "To achieve harmony, all the elements have to agree and enhance each other," she says. This doesn't mean everything matching – objects can clash, "but in a beautiful way". For example, a Kou signature design would be a clean, modern silhouette, with softer elements of traditional culture. She would play with textures and lighting, which is important, and leave some spaces open to help the chi flow.

"Less is more – I don't like little things all over the place," Kou says. "But I would have one statement piece, which could be a sofa or painting, a statue or fireplace, and use one strong colour to link everything up."

Suzu Annetta, of Studio Annetta, says it pays to get the architecture and flow of space right before you start thinking about finishes. "It's not just an aesthetics thing, I honestly think people can sense when a space is not designed well, before it is decorated. Things like the correct scale, proportion, symmetry and balance play a big part and help to make a space feel harmonious."

Annetta also advocates taking care of the small details in a space to help make a home feel right. "This doesn't mean hiding personal belongings and not allowing your personality to show, it just means planning the space well so it feels like it was designed for living well."

Designers at Life Styling Ltd play close attention to accessories. Kris Sabasch says, "We love bringing in natural elements, plants and fresh flowers, as a way to achieve harmony."

Monique McLintock, founder of Monique McLintock Interiors, advises clients to keep things simple. "Often, I have clients who want to use eight different materials in each room, thinking if they did not have a feature wall in each it would look

boring," she says. "On the contrary, the more materials and paint colours you use in a space the busier it looks. You can use the same neutral colour palette throughout the house as long as you add different textures: silk cushions on rough linen, or rough textured tiles against a smooth countertop surface. By adding texture you create visual interest without having to add more colour."

Contact list

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Software solution to dust-ups over decor

David Coleman

It all came down to a coffee table. On an otherwise normal autumn day 10 years ago, D.D. Allen, the fashionable New York interior designer, was showing a married couple, whose flat she was redoing, some Japanese furniture at Naga Antiques on the Upper East Side. "Such a Zen space," she recalls, wryly.

Tension between the two started to mount; they began to bicker, then quarrel, then fight. Then it turned into a meltdown right out of *War of the Roses*.

"It got ugly," Allen says. "We were looking at this coffee table, and suddenly it became the symbol of everything that was wrong between them. We were just talking about where it would go and whether it would work, but it became, like: 'If you think that, you don't understand anything about me.'"

Luckily, there was no china handy. Finally, the screaming match subsided and the couple stormed off in different directions. A few days went by. Then, Allen says: "We got a call from the husband wanting to resell all the furniture."

Few marital bust-ups over decor actually end in divorce. But as Allen and her peers acknowledge, such scuffles are so common that marriage counselling services could have its own line in the standard design contract. Interior designers have rockier psychological issues to contend with than do most client-based professionals simply because they effect transformations that – for all the plaster and wallpaper that go into them – can get almost as personal as psychoanalysis.

But help may be on the way. Architectural designer Christopher Travis, who has long given a kind of personality test to his clients to avoid

these collisions, plans to roll out a software version of his tool in December. For his product, called Truehome, Travis' clients answer questions intended to expose deep-seated domestic preferences that they may not even be aware of.

"It's about how to reduce friction," Travis says of the software, which he hopes to licence to other design professionals. "I ask them, where in your home do you find your spouse particularly irritating? It's easier to remodel houses than people." Often, he says, the solution is just some personal space they can call their own. "I give a lot of guys man-caves. But we've also found a huge desire for women-caves."

They can disagree over the simplest things – a fabric or a wallpaper or a bill. If you're smart you never take sides

Mario Buatta, designer

Whether Truehome will catch on is anyone's guess, but it's clear that no designer is immune to the problem it addresses. Mario Buatta, Victoria Hagan, Robert Couturier, Lee Mindel – they've all seen their share of couples' spats.

"You're spending so much time with people in their homes – you hear everything," Buatta says. "They can disagree over the simplest things – a fabric or a wallpaper or a bill. If you're smart you never take sides. I leave the room and let them square things off."

The New York Times



Christopher Travis has developed software called Truehome, intended to expose deep-seated domestic preferences. Photo: NYT

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