



Feng Shui for the Holidays: When Less is Truly More

by Sheryll Hirschberger Reichwein

In our culture, the Holiday Season has traditionally been a time to celebrate life's bounty through enormous feasts and ever more gift giving. In these strained economic times, when for many of us the flow of income is slowed or shut off, assembling these feasts and purchasing these gifts can be extremely stressful and often impossible.

How do we reconcile our idealized images of the bountiful Thanksgiving table and the gifts crammed to capacity beneath the Christmas tree with our current limitations?

Does the answer lie in accepting austerity as a form of self-punishment for our years of collective over-indulging? Is a sense of lack and disappointment simply the price we must inevitably pay?

Or, could it be possible to find joy in the experience of having less than we've had before?

Feng Shui grows out of the ancient Taoist philosophical tree. Two core concepts of Taoism are Yin and Yang. In the West, we are most familiar with Yin and Yang as symbols of the feminine and masculine principles. In Feng Shui, the concepts of Yin and Yang are much broader, encompassing all of life in a continuum of receptivity and activity, a never ending in-breath to out-breath.

Balanced expression of Yin and Yang in a home means appropriate spaces for rest and rooms for activity. Rooms for rest feature muted colors, dimmed lighting, sparse furnishings, and quiet decorations. Rooms for activity feature bright color, strong lighting, abundant furnishings, and energizing decorations.

According to the Taoist tradition, Yin and Yang only exist in an ongoing dance of relationship to each other. When we move to Yin, we move away from Yang. When we move to Yang, we move away from Yin. Like sitting on a seesaw moving up and down, in balanced life we enjoy the ride. However, when we spend too much time on one side of the seesaw and avoid spending time on the other, our ride stops short.

As a child, did you ever have the misfortune of being thrown off of a seesaw by another child who disrupted the rhythm, forcing the seesaw back down when it should have gone up? I can still remember the surprise, fear, and ultimate thump. Boom, on my butt. The "friend" laughing. My feeling of betrayal at being the victim of broken rules. Instead of flowing in a positive receptive state, the jarring disruptive created a negative experience. In Feng Shui, we understand this as too much Yang creating negative Yin.

In our homes, when we have too much stuff and too much activity, we have an expression of negative Yang. Taken to the extreme, too much of even good stuff and good activity invites the expression of its opposite energy, negative Yin. We become exhausted, ill, impoverished.



Having lost our balance, we invite the very things into our life that we have been striving so hard to avoid. Experiencing the void of negative Yin, we often redouble our efforts to fill our lives with more Yang. Feeling impoverished, we get more stuff. Getting more stuff, we feel more impoverished. Once it's started, the negative cycle rolls on and on.

Through Feng Shui, we find the remedy in embracing less. Once we understand that less is truly more, we can celebrate the process of reducing the Yang in our lives and homes. By choosing to have less stuff and participating in less activity, we can begin to invite positive Yin back into our lives.

As we decide which stuff to hold onto and which stuff to let go of, we begin to reawaken our understanding of what truly brings us satisfaction and find we naturally need less. When we choose to reduce our activity to those things that truly bring us joy, we find that doing less enhances our feeling of having a fuller life.

During this holiday season, rather than struggling with limitations, consider embracing less. Ask yourself, "What do I need to have to experience what I find is essential about the holidays?" "What do I need to do to feel engaged in celebration?" "How much is just enough?"

Share this exploration with family and friends. Help each other to ask new questions and find new answers. Refuse to accept feeling of lack and disappointment – expressions of negative Yin.

Purge your home of stuff that no longer serves you. If you don't have positive Yin spaces, create them. Create a space for meditation. And use it. Strip your bedroom of stuff that is not restful. Then, catch up on your sleep. Curl up in your favorite corner and read. Or do nothing.

This holiday season, find the joy and well-being in having less.

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