



The front door is uncluttered and welcoming with a warm-coloured brick path leading to it and climbers softening the façade. Gently coloured herbaceous borders flank the door and a double row of pleached trees frame the entrance area and create a sense of arrival.

A hearth area near the kitchen includes a large outdoor dining table under an oak pergola with a barbecue and fire bowl, where friends and family can gather, share food and fellowship and create happy memories.

This new house was built in an ideal position towards the top of a slope with a protective 'chair back' of trees. In a smaller garden a hedge, fence or wall can make the house feel comfortably held in the setting, while planting trees will ground the house and give it a sense of scale in proportion to the sky.

An area of tranquil planting near the house, with a simple raised reflection pool, provides a calm space away from the livelier hub, while a larger pond below the garden arrival area collects dispersed energy in the form of water.

Parking is moved away from the house with bays for visitors here and more at the rear. In a smaller garden a layer of planting in pots or gravel can be a buffer between cars and the house.

A curved drive or path from the outside of the property, flanked with planting, allows the energy coming off the street to be filtered, as well as giving those arriving time to unwind, leave the outside world behind, and enjoy the garden on the way in.

The arrival area, known in *feng shui* as the *ming tang*, or bright hall, is where all prosperous energy gathers. Here the layout is a circle within a square, but any enclosed shape will gather good *qi*.

Vibrant planting beside the kitchen draws the eye and adds *yang* energy to the main family party area around the dining room and pergola, as well as providing a visual focal point to lead around from the front door.

Creating a garden where you can thrive

Is it possible to improve how you feel simply by changing the layout of your garden? Designer Marian Boswall suggests ways to create a garden full of healthy energy

WORDS MARIAN BOSWALL

Have you noticed how some gardens can inspire you while others seem to make you feel uncomfortable? Do you associate one of your happiest times with a specific place? Or perhaps your life once changed significantly when you moved home. As well as giving us physical protection the environment in which we live gives us support, and allows us to thrive.

The idea of a place having a spirit, or what the Romans described as a *genius loci*, that can have a tangible effect on our psyche is not new. Anyone who has ever visited Rousham, for example, will almost certainly have experienced the profoundly serene and energising spirit of this garden where in the 18th century, the landscape designer and polymath William Kent worked with the lay of the land to create one of our most inspiring gardens.

Before Kent, philosophers and artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, understood the importance of ensuring that the proportions of everything should be in relation to the human form. Renaissance landscape architecture extended this connection by aligning sight lines to the compass points of the Earth and sun's trajectory.

Positive energy

The study of Earth energy has made something of a comeback of late, but the way the layout of a site could help people thrive was studied as early as 206BCE, during the Han dynasty in China. Then a *kanyu* or *feng shui* practitioner was considered an expert in astrology, architecture, economics, geography, hydrology, medicine, sociology and town planning, and it was his job to lay out spaces for humans and animals to thrive in. Fundamental to their work was the balance between two types of energy, or *qi* – *yin* (restful and calm) and *yang* (energetic and exciting) – to allow for both creativity and nurture. So how can you design

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▷ your garden to fill it with good energy and create a place in which you can thrive?

A curved drive or path, for example, from the outside of the property to the front door with plants around it will allow guests time to enjoy your garden before they arrive at your house. In *feng shui* the area in front of the house is where all good energy gathers from afar, like a pool of prosperity, known as a *ming tang*. In ancient China, it symbolised a ceremonial hall in the Emperor's Palace where the *qi* was considered most potent. The hall would have had a round roof and square foundation, symbolising heaven and earth. I have always envisaged this as a gathering in of good feeling like a welcome hug on arrival for you and your guests. This would ideally have a body of water in or near, be it a pond or a trough, in proportion to the house where good *qi* could accumulate.

The front door is key to allowing the good in and keeping out the bad, and should be welcoming but uncluttered. Mine is surrounded by pots so that means keeping the plants thriving and tidy so that it looks healthy and vibrant. Move cars away where possible or plant between them and the door, to allow a filter and pause between home and the outside world.

Inner protection

It is restful to have the house's back garden protected with a wall, fence, bank of trees or hedge, and for the front to face the most active view. On a slope, the front garden would ideally be lower than the back and face a good road or river of vibrant energy, and if you have the choice the ideal place for a home is near the top of a hill with trees; a grounding link between heaven and earth on any site.

Inside the garden a hearth or gathering space will provide the nurture of fellowship and laughter, and could be a fire pit, a hot tub or just a big table for friendly meals. Planting should be restful and vibrant in turn, the aim is to seek *shen qi* – or good, creative and fertile *qi* – and avoid or transform unhealthy *sha qi*. Shadowy corners can be brightened up with light planting, and the trick is to put the *qi* where you want the attention to go, so if you have an unavoidably ugly or draining spot, put a tree, shrub or feature to redirect the flow elsewhere.

Like many design frameworks, the striking thing about *feng shui* is the way it puts into words things which we probably already felt unconsciously. We cannot always influence the macro environment of where we live, be it rural or urban, but if we are able to design it thoughtfully, we can create a garden where we can thrive. □

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1 GATHER ROUND

A hearth or gathering area is created with a simple dining table in a comfortably enclosed area in this courtyard garden. Calm planting of *Hakonechloa macra* and umbrella-trained *Tilia x europaea* provides a gathering space for friends and family to share meals, news and laughter.



2 WINDING PATH

This curved pathway leading up to Reighton Wood house in Kent, creates a sense of journey through both calming and vibrant planting towards the house, allowing time for decompression and relaxation alongside the chance to be uplifted by the vibrant *yang* energy planting.



3 QUIET REFLECTION

In this zen-inspired courtyard a small reflection pool near the house is surrounded by simple *yin* (relaxing) colours, such as that of the white *Tulipa* 'Spring Green', to be soothing and restorative. Behind, the wall and the *Acer griseum*, which quietly tones with the reclaimed brick, add to the comforting feel.