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MAKE-UP AND MORE





Space cadets

You are what you keep, according to *feng shui* expert Karen Kingston. By Sharon Bradley

The old saying about selling snow to Eskimos sprang to mind when we heard that Karen Kingston, the world's leading exponent of a specialist branch of *feng shui* called space clearing, was coming to Singapore to conduct a three-day workshop. "The Chinese have been living with *feng shui* for millennia," harrumphed one staffer. "What can an English woman possibly have to say on the subject?" Er, quite a bit, it appears.

"I remember deciding round about the age of 11 that what I was looking for wasn't in books," says the guru, settling back into a sofa at the Goodwood Park Hotel. "I wanted to know the underlying reasons why things are so. Eventually, I realised that I must find the answers for myself. So I started to develop my own sensory apparatus until the unseen world was as tangible to me as the seen world. It wasn't until years later, in Bali, that I discovered an island of 3 million people, all practising the techniques that I had been developing independently for years. It was heaven."

Kingston, a compelling speaker, goes on to explain how her interest in Space Clearing — a term she coined in 1989 — grew out of her early embracing of the principles of *feng shui* (although, at that time, she had no idea that that's what it was called) and her subsequent immersion in Balinese culture. "When I wrote a book about it [her 1996 "bible", *Creating Sacred Space With Feng Shui*], I got a lot of letters from Chinese, Indians and Africans saying that I was articulating concepts that even their elders had forgotten." To Western audiences, on the other hand, she was exposing something new and wondrous. In 1998, the book was Amazon.com's biggest-selling *feng shui* title.

So what is Space Clearing? In a nutshell, Kingston believes that the buildings in which we live and work are caked with the psychic clutter left behind by their former occupants. Like dust that collects in corners, this "sticky, treacly" presence brings stagnancy to a room, stealing its vitality and inhibiting circulation

of life-affirming *chi*. Space Clearing is the device used to dispel it. "Predecessor energy can affect you in many ways," says Kingston. "If, for example, the last people who lived in your home got divorced, chances are that you will also have relationship problems, simply because that energy is still hanging around."

Kingston's brand of ghost-busting involves a 23-step ceremony that makes use of "props", such as a purifying bell, holy water, candles, incense, flowers and harmony balls. When Mel, a podiatrist, moved with her husband and young son into a new apartment recently, she decided to have it "space cleared" by Kingston's Singapore-based acolyte, Tracey Stanton. "Life just hadn't been flowing smoothly for us," says Mel. "I'd just been through a traumatic ectopic pregnancy and John was having a difficult time at work. We felt we needed to try something that would get us back on track." To begin with, Mel says she felt a bit nervous and giggly. "But as we got more involved in the two-hour ceremony, I started to relax. Afterwards, the house felt great and even John, who'd been sceptical, said it felt really special, like there'd been a birth or wedding there. Tracey picked out objects that were special to us — like a photo of my late father — and sprinkled them with petals. All these warm memories attached to them came flooding back. It made our house feel like a home somehow."

Central to the Kingston philosophy is the elimination of clutter — "things that we neither use nor love, things that are untidy or disorganized, too many things in too small a space or anything that's unfinished." Most people tend to think of possessions as assets and are reluctant to throw them out on the basis that they may "come in handy some day," Kingston argues that keeping unloved or unused objects saps your energy, anchors you to your past and contributes to a feeling of being "stuck".

"I go into a person's house and everything looks perfectly innocent," she says. "But when I energy-sense it, I immediately start getting a history from it. I can get really specific about every single object in that home. If an ornament, for example, was given to my client by her ex-husband — someone she doesn't want to have anything to do with anymore — it is obvious to me. Every time she looks at this object, subconsciously she remembers her ex. I advise her that if she has too many objects like this in her home, her life is simply too full for anything new to come in." She pauses. "I never ask people to get rid of things. All I ever do is tell them how it's affecting them. No-one wants to be told what to do with their clutter; they have to make up their own minds."

"You know, it's common sense, really," says one local businesswoman of Kingston's Space Clearing. Over the course of the last three weekends, she has powered her way through both of Kingston's books (her second, *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*, was published in 1998), carved a swathe of Zen minimalism through her possession-clogged apartment and transformed her handbag into a Gucci shrine to efficiency. "But there are times in your life when you need to hear common sense. Karen has a way of making this stuff very accessible. To be honest, since I started tidying up, I'm buzzing with energy and creativity for the first time in months." ■

Creating Sacred Space With Feng Shui (Platkus; \$28.95) and *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui* (Platkus; \$18.95) are available in bookstores. For more information about Karen and Space Clearing in Singapore, call Tracey Stanton on 6743 3364 or e-mail her at tracy@ndalchemistry.com. Karen, together with her Balinese husband, Rai, runs a *feng shui* hotel in Bali. For more information, please go to www.dancingdragons.com.