



are you home?

by Lou and Bruce Stewart of The Inner Arts Studio

These days many people are taking time to reexamine their relationship to the places where they live and work. This trend is having a positive effect on how they live their lives and conduct their business.



Is your house a home? Does it reflect who you are? Is it a welcoming place to which you look forward to returning at the end of the day? Or does it feel more like the four walls where you happen to sleep? What about the physical space over which you have control at your workplace? Does it support and sustain you in the performance of your duties? Or is it more of a box, a cell to which you are confined each day? The way we relate to our physical spaces is often a reflection of other aspects of our lives.



Charlotte's Story

Charlotte had high hopes that moving into the new house she and her husband had built would heal her relationship with him and improve their lives. But after six months, she realized how uncomfortable she felt just walking in the front door. As she recognized how dissatisfied she was with the house, the distance between her and her husband grew. She knew something needed to change. She tried rearranging furniture and many other things, but none of these helped. Charlotte began to sense that the problem was deeper than the design of the house.

Charlotte called us to help her. As she described her situation, it became clear that her lack of self-confidence and inability to stand up for herself was the root of her dissatisfaction. She began to see how the design of the entire house and even

the choices of the individual pieces of furniture were all her husband's. From the deer head in the den to the massive desk in their bedroom, the overall styling of their house left little room for Charlotte's personal expression.

Since her interests were not represented in the house, Charlotte felt like she didn't belong there. This attitude of not belonging in her own home amplified her lack of confidence. Her home had become a trigger for all these negative feelings and emotions.

In Charlotte's case, the first thing that needed attention was her self-esteem. Using some effective techniques from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Charlotte found the courage to stand up for herself for the first time in many years. By establishing a stronger sense of self, Charlotte was able to recognize that she was not only worthy of being represented in the

house, but this was essential in correcting the balance in her relationship with her husband.

She then asked her husband to help make some changes in their home by applying the harmonizing principles of Feng Shui. Because she drew on her new-found sense of self in delivering her request with ease, her husband agreed. This collaboration made a remarkable difference in their relationship, and the new improvements in their house finally allowed Charlotte to feel at home. The combination of a shift in Charlotte's belief about herself and the spatial enhancements

saved Charlotte from a painful divorce and the possibility of having to sell their newly built house. This example shows what a powerful influence our living conditions are in making us feel accepted, comfortable, and truly at home.

The Importance of Standards

Many people know that their living conditions could be improved but may not be sure where or how to start. Yet the relationship between our surroundings and our attitudes is reflexive. Our living spaces reveal a lot about our attitudes about life, and our attitudes and beliefs are made manifest in our surroundings. Not only does your house affect how you feel, your attitudes about your home have a great effect on how you live. Given this, what

attitudes do you have about your home? Is it possible that there are aspects of your environment or your relationships that you are merely tolerating? "Tolerating" is a word we associate with some level of stress. It suggests tension and strain—gritted teeth and tight facial expressions.

When it comes to your living environment, standards or criteria become vitally important. Do you know what your standards are? Could you say what it takes to make you sigh with pleasure as you cross your threshold? The quickest way to understand your personal standards is to ask yourself what is essential to you. What could you not do without? What has to be there?

Many people find that they have lofty standards for their environment and become dissatisfied when they fall even a little bit short of manifesting the desired outcome. This can cause considerable distress. If this is happening, look again at your standards. Are they unrealistic? Are things measuring up in a reasonable fashion, or are you just tolerating the situation? Some of our standards have to do with concrete items and details, while others are entirely emotional. Approaching the issue with this in mind allows you to make well-considered changes. You'll find that it's reassuring to know that you can heal

the source of any situation you are merely tolerating by addressing your standards, rather than just ignoring the problems or hoping they will resolve themselves.

If you live with someone, it's a good idea to find a mutually convenient time for discussing your standards with each other. Standards that have never been articulated are the breeding ground for discontent. Questions like, "Where do we place the TV?"; "What colors do we want on the walls?"; "What accents shall we choose?" put cohabitation into realistic terms. While meditation can help you become clear about your standards, compassionate two-way communication conveys them best.

Charlotte discovered that, apart from other concerns about space and furniture items, feeling recognized and loved were her essential standards. She also valued having a quiet place for herself where she could read and think. What are yours? Do you have any idea what your partner's might be?

Honoring Past and Present

Frank, an advertising executive, lived by himself for years. While it was easy for him to express his standards at work, he lacked the ability to make assertive choices in his home environment. When



we asked him what he thought his home said about him, he replied, "It looks like a confirmed bachelor's home that had been set up by his mother." Actually, most of the furniture was inherited from his parents and was arranged just as his mother had done it in their family home. Frank's essential nature was not present in his surroundings. He even admitted that sometimes he felt like he was still living in his parents' house. Of course, this was affecting him on many levels.

As Frank began thinking about how he could more accurately make his home reflect his tastes, he came to an impasse. How could he keep his treasured heirlooms and honor his parents, yet make his home more up-to-date? By the time he came to us, Frank was convinced that he would always be stuck beneath this self-imposed psychological ceiling.

Frank's use of language indicated that he had a preference for visualizing outcomes. We asked him to envision the best possible outcome for his present home. When he saw how he could blend his standards with those cherished heirlooms, a smile came over his face. With some guidance, he was able visualize the chain of events that would allow him to gracefully make the necessary changes to his place. He pictured his antique furniture reupholstered with more contemporary fabrics and interspersed with a few modern pieces designed by a friend. Now when Frank walks into his home, he feels rejuvenated knowing that his surroundings are congruent with his core standards.

Tell Yourself the Truth

To get a better idea of how well your surroundings fit you, answer the following questions with the first thoughts that pop into your head. Where is your favorite spot in your home? What standards or values does this represent to you? In what ways is it congruent with who you are? If you would like to reinforce this, go there and get comfortable. Write a few notes

to yourself, if you wish. Have a sip of something light and refreshing. Take in a couple deep breaths. You deserve this break!

Next, think of your least favorite spot. Where is it situated? What does this area lack? If you could do just one thing to improve this space and make it more congruent with your standards, what would you do? You may want to make notes about how you can proceed.

Sometimes it helps to step back from events and experience ourselves from a different perspective. When it comes to Feng Shuiing your place, you could imagine that you had a bird's eye view of your finished spaces. What would they look like? How appealing is your design from that viewpoint? Is there anything you'd prefer to see there instead? This brief exercise will give you some fresh information for when you re-address your plans.

When you become clearer about your living and working spaces, you naturally begin to see where and how improvements can be made. Working through tolerations and advocating for what you believe in can have a profound effect not only on the ultimate way your home looks but on the way you feel. The ancient Chinese understood that enhancing one's environment with clear intention also benefits the mind and spirit. This principle certainly continues to hold true as your strong intentions to improve your home allow you to renovate your mind as well, and from this flows greater health and happiness.

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