

# ECOCHI®

## designing the HUMAN EXPERIENCE

by Debra Duneier

Every space has a life of its own, and impacts us as we go about our lives. Our actions, energy and thoughts, as well as our physical well-being, are all profoundly influenced by our surroundings. The design, color scheme, textures, light, furnishings, accessories and placement of each item in our indoor environments impact our senses from moment to moment and shape how we feel about ourselves and others. This is true whether we are at home, at work or in public spaces. This heightened understanding of how our interiors affect us both consciously and unconsciously is the solid foundation of the EcoChi®.

EcoChi is a lifestyle shift that meticulously blends the powerful modern and ancient lessons of green and sustainable living, environmental psychology and classical Feng Shui, to revolutionize how people feel when they are inside a building. Most of us spend 98% of our time indoors. When we are at work at our desks, watching sports on television, eating our meals at home or in restaurants, playing video games or enjoying museums or theater, it is easy to forget our connection to the outdoor world. Still, some of the happiest moments of our lives are spent in nature. We all have recollections of these experiences – a blazing sunset, the scent of the ocean air, animal life encountered on a stroll through the woods, the view of a pastel sunrise from a mountaintop, a golden harvest moon or the fleeting glimpse of a mammoth butterfly.

In Eastern philosophy, it is believed that one's life and the natural world are inseparable from one another. As we become more attentive to nature, we become more aware of ourselves. When we find ways to bring nature's elements into indoor spaces, the effects on the inhabitants is extremely positive. The possibilities of benefits are innumerable:

- ❖ Attainment of personal goals such as wealth, love, happiness
- ❖ Physical and mental well-being
- ❖ Moving forward after a loss or crisis
- ❖ Taking back the reins of control over one's life
- ❖ Living in harmony and balance

If you are a person that believes in social justice, self-actualization, health, wellness, and are aligned with our environment, you are not alone. 1 in 4 Americans have these values and are considered part of the LOHAS (lifestyle of health and sustainability) movement. Those who study the new wellness and "green" conscious consumers call this a trend. I believe it is our values awakened after a long sleep. It is an exciting time! A time of change and endless possibilities.

### Messages to Yourself

Have you noticed how we are bombarded with advertisements? Whether attending a sports event, at work on our computers, walking down the street or even in a taxi, we are receiving all kinds of messages. The advertising business is thriving. Why? Because it works. So, my question to you is, what kinds of messages are you sending yourself? Kim Hubbard of People Magazine reviewed Dr. Esther Sternberg's book "Healing Spaces" and was quoted as saying, "...pleasing surroundings can have a profound impact on our health...The trick is to place yourself in environments that trigger those positive responses..."

Colors affect healing and the overall state of mind. They are one of the most impactful visual elements in a space. The most calming colors duplicate those in nature. Soft blues, greens, and beige tones create the image of a pale blue sky or a new plant in the spring; they are grounding. Lavenders, pastel pinks, soft peaches, can have a relaxing effect as well. Yellow represents earth energy and is the color associated with optimism. When creating an exciting space, reach for reds, oranges and contrasting color combinations. These colors stimulate and enhance feelings of passion.

There are other elements to consider when creating a visually pleasing space. When purposely designing an interior for a positive experience one must consider shape, texture, light, furniture placement, natural elements (such as water fountains and plants), and your favorite decorative items.





## EcoChi® Tips for Better Living

- ❶ **Water soothes...** so we love to be near water. After all, our own bodies are 70% water! People gather around fountains all over the world. The sound comforts us, the splashing delights us. It makes us happy. We are reminded that we are a small part of something grand. Place a water fountain or fish bowl in your home. Be sure to keep the water clean at all times and enjoy.
- ❷ **Indoor trees and plants** are not only pleasurable to look at but also bring additional health benefits. Plants purify the air through the tiny pores in their leaves that act as air filters. Now that's a breath of fresh air!
- ❸ **Organic produce:** There is nothing like the taste of home grown vegetables and fruits. What do you do if you have no garden? You can grow herbs and even some vegetables potted in organic soil near your window. They smell great, taste fabulous, nourish and connect you to Mother Nature.
- ❹ **We all have times when our lives seem out of control, and we need to ground ourselves.** In those times, head outdoors! Take a walk-no matter the weather. Plant your feet on the ground and raise your arms to the heavens. Take deep breaths. You may even want to find a big old wise tree. Sit under it, put your hand on the trunk, smooth its leaves, feel its sturdiness and wisdom. This will help you to get back to your natural rhythm.
- ❺ **Feeling too wired to sleep?** Electromagnetic fields (EMFs) which are emitted from electronic equipment can cause restlessness. Keep a green plant near your electronics to absorb EMFs and pull the plug when not in use. If you must keep your cell phone on be sure it is at least 5 feet away from your bed.

## Declutter your life with the SMG System (Stay, Maybe and Go)

Clutter creates an unsettling energy in our interiors and makes us feel uncomfortable and stressed.

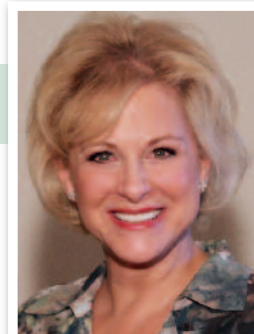
From a feng shui perspective, clutter is like having clogged arteries in your body. When you clear it out, it opens up your veins and arteries and allows wonderful things to flow into your life. If you are determined to attack your clutter, try my "SMG System" (Stay, Maybe and Go). Begin to work your way through your clutter with baby steps. Start with making small piles. If you haven't used something in a year it goes into the "Go" pile. The things that you find it difficult to separate from should make its way to the "Maybe" pile. Stuff that you are still using goes onto the "Stay" pile. You will be surprised as to how many things start to easily flow from the "Maybe" to the "Go" pile.

If it is a sentimental item that evokes a memory, take a photo of it. This way you can hold on to it forever. The longer you look at your possessions during this process — clothing, furniture, letters, and so much more that you have accumulated in your life — the more you will realize that, in truth, you do not need them. With this new attitude, the all-important "Go" pile will keep growing! Remember to donate items from the "Go" pile to people in need and recycle whenever possible. It is important to remember how the chi, or energy in your body, vibrates like a transmitter and attracts the same kind of energy that surrounds it. By creating more organized and harmonious surroundings, you can foster a calmer, more centered life and spirit.

## Unspoken Dangers Indoors

There are more than 75,000 synthetic volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in building materials and furnishings. These extremely harmful toxins are found inside our homes, offices and public spaces and are being released or off-gassed into the air we breathe. Be aware of the materials you use and how they are installed.

Create a people-friendly indoor space by choosing furniture and decorative materials that are natural, organic and have



## Meet Debra Duneier

Founder and President of EcoChi, LLC, an accredited LEED® Green Associate, Certified Eco-Designer, Feng Shui Master Practitioner, and New York State licensed real estate broker.

Ms. Duneier is the creator of the EcoChi® system of design and the award winning author of *EcoChi: Designing the Human Experience*. Her training, background and perspective have made her a resource on topics including: interior design, Feng Shui, real estate, green design and sustainability for media outlets including Martha Stewart Radio, Brokers Weekly, Social Life Magazine, Barons.com, HealthyLife.net Radio, Better Homes and Gardens TV, CNBC, MSNBC, CBS and the Associated Press. Debra and her EcoChi concept have also been featured in the Green Issue of Enterprising Women's Magazine, Fast Company, GreenCityChallenge.org, Sierra Club, The Wall Street Journal and The Huffington Post. Debra is the Feng Shui designer expert for the reality show "Natural Reboot" on the Veria Living Network. EcoChi is being featured on the TV show "The Glamorous Life TV" in 2014.

New York Magazine featured EcoChi for its innovation in design of the McKissack & McKissack New York offices.

Their community outreach office features the first indoor living green wall in Harlem. The AIA NY Subway Show featured the EcoChi Indoor Park in their annual exhibit.

Debra is a Board Director for the Women Builders Council and Sarut Group. She is also a member of the U.S. Green Building Council, Green Building Worldwide, the Green Construction and Design Committee of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, the International Feng Shui Guild,



AIA New York and a founding member of both the Belizean Grove and the LEXCI Group of the Women's Leadership Exchange. She also served as a member of the advisory board of Corcoran Group and was its first elected secretary. Debra accepted an invitation from Senator Kirsten Gillibrand to join her working group for healthy children and was honored as one of the Top Women in Real Estate by Sokol Media/Green Matters Magazine for her creation of the EcoChi system of design.





no chemical treatments. NO-VOC paints are widely available today from recognizable brands but you have to ask for them. These paints are free of the usual toxins that impair your indoor air quality when using the standard formulas. Select carpeting and rugs that are made from natural materials. Be sure they are installed with low-VOC adhesives certified by Carpet Label Plus .

Make informed, conscious purchases when shopping for household cleaning products. Lemon juice, baking soda and white vinegar can be effective alternatives to what you are using today. There are more “green” soaps, liquids and sprays on the market than ever, and it can be confusing. Look for cleaning products that have GREEN SEAL certification which means the healthfulness of the product has been verified by a third party. These products are safe for most people and earth-friendly

## For the Best Human Experience Possible

Ancient Chinese philosophy teaches us that we have a measure of control over our lives and that by using feng shui techniques we can balance Chi and maximize good luck. However, it is generally agreed that feng shui only works if you are a person who also lives by this short list, which I have named “The Three Points of Honor.” These are:

- ① Educate yourself so that you have clarity in what you think and do
- ② Understand that we cannot control fate but can create opportunities
- ③ Undertake good deeds consciously, as an act of free will

I advise my clients to check this short but profound list before, during and after incorporating EcoChi into their lives and projects. It is important that your core persona be aligned with these three principles, because they are vital to designing the best human experience possible. ❖

Debra Duneier is an accredited LEED® Green Associate, Certified Eco-Designer, Feng Shui Master Practitioner and Creator of EcoChi®. Debra is an award winning Author of EcoChi: Designing the Human Experience and Reality TV Feng Shui expert on Veria Network’s upcoming show “Natural Reboot.” [www.ecochi.com](http://www.ecochi.com)