



The feng shui of alpinism

Let Chinese wisdom turn you into an alpine ace

BY MAJKA BURHARDT

When in the mountains, I try to stack the odds in my favor. I have the sharpest crampons and the best energy food, I wait for the most impeccable weather forecast, and I *always* bring my pocket guide to feng shui.

Feng shui is very important in all aspects of life. The Chinese have used feng shui for over 5000 years to design their environments to maximize their careers, relationships, and finances. By examining all objects and their corresponding chi (vital energy), feng shui takes organization to a new level — one where it can determine success. Take an office, for example: Feng shui tells us that your desk is your place of power and that your work space should be clutter free. I recently moved my desk, organized my files, and *Voilà!* I wrote this piece and got it published. Now for an alpinist, the goal is admittedly different — an alpinist desires summits. Feng shui can help you rack them up.

In the mountains, Feng shui is even more important than in its traditional fields of home and life organization. Chi is everywhere in the natural world: Absent people, the mountains exist in a constant state of free-flowing chi. When you enter the mountains you bring along blocks to chi (your clothes, equipment, etc.) that can keep you from bagging your next ice-clad beast. Let's say you plan a three-week trip to the Ruth Gorge, in Alaska, only to be spanked continuously by

the weather and avalanche-prone routes. If you're like most ordinary (i.e. non-feng-shui-savvy) alpinists, you'll probably leave the Ruth dejected, blaming yourself, the weather gods, your lazy, lovesick partner, and that mysterious bug you caught in Nepal. Though all of these elements played a part, you're forgetting perhaps the main cause of your failure: bad feng shui.

Bad feng shui is the source for many missed summits and unrequited love affairs in the mountains. Max Sedlmeyer and Karl Mehringer's ill-fated first attempt on the Eiger Nordwand — bad feng shui. Joe Simpson's catastrophic epic on Siula Grande — bad feng shui. Jim Donini, Michael Kennedy, and Jeff and George Lowe's heroic bid on Latok — bad feng shui.

A recovering alpinist myself, I've assembled critical information about the ways other alpinists can use feng shui to better their chances of success. Armed with this information, you'll soon be tackling that serac-studded summit with the feng shui gods on your side.

Dress for success

For too long, alpinists have haphazardly combined colors that send a mixed message to the universe. Think of Barry Blanchard on Nanga Parbat's Rupal face, the endless photos of Pete Takeda and Dave Sheldon on Meru Sharkfin, or the

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MIKE TEA

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covers of *Climbing's* last three Epics issues. (In these photos, the climbers were wearing typical mountaineering outfits: blue long underwear, black fleece tights, green fleece shirt, mauve windbreaker, and a one-piece, aqua-and-red Gore-tex suit to finish.) Though *you* may see a fairly well-dressed climber, the feng-shui cognoscenti see an accident waiting to happen.

Each color has its own energy and identity, both of which let the universe know what you're seeking. Our climber is pursuing success and prosperity with his darkly clad lower body, while the green fleece shirt is a plea for family, the mauve windbreaker for love. Meanwhile, the multihued Gore-tex is waging its own war of self-cultivation versus fame. The universe doesn't know if this climber wants to reach the top or hit the local bar in hopes of spreading his seed. No wonder his chances of summiting are next to nil. *Come on people, choose a color scheme!* Instead of trying to look like a moving rainbow, stick to two or three strong colors. Since it's the summit you're after, I suggest black for career success, red for fame (which will surely come after), and purple for prosperity.

Accessorizing

Perhaps the strongest thing that we alpinists have going for us is metal, weighty (and contrary to light-and-fast thinking) though it may be. In feng shui, metal represents abundance, so bring on the gear — pickets, ice screws, carabiners, ice axes, pots, stoves, etc. Up until the last century,

HOUSE YOUR TOKENS OF FAME NEAR
YOUR HEAD WHEN YOU SLEEP.

IF — LIKE MOST CLIMBERS — YOU'RE
ALREADY FAMOUS IN YOUR OWN
MIND, THEN YOU'RE SET.

metal was exceedingly expensive — those who owned it were thought to be wealthy. Even if you're a total dirtbag, your \$1200 rack can look like dollar signs in the eyes of a beloved *and* increase your odds in the high mountains. This should come as a relief to alpinists everywhere, serving as further justification to pillage dumpsters, put another 100,000 miles on the Toyota, and opt for the \$3-per-night Kathmandu lodging special in the hopes of saving for a new set of offset cams.

Tent organization

How many times have you tossed your gear into the tent, lain down, and gone to sleep only to awake to bad weather and worse conditions? Again, consider feng shui, which you can use to structure the design of your home (read: tent) so as to maximize wealth and prosperity (read: summits and success). With the help of the Bagua Map, you can solve the "unsolvable" mystery of bad luck, finding the optimal spot for everything in your tent. Just think, for years you may have been keeping the toilet paper in the area of wealth and prosperity, giving you impressive regularity but wiping away any chance you had of establishing that new line on Cerro Torre.

Immediately upon entering your tent you are in the career zone. Place your route topos here, along with any guidebooks or maps. Take care not to clutter this area with your pee bottle or nonsense like the newest *Maxim* or *Cosmo*. Looking in from your tent's entrance, the upper right-hand corner is the love-and-marriage location. If you usually avoid this topic, you can substitute photos of your dog, favorite

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farm animal, or even a micro pin-up of Ricky Martin or Britney Spears.

Long, straight lines are oppressive in feng shui, especially when they're above your head. Chi stagnates beneath these lines, creating a feeling of unbearable weight. Unfortunately, most tents have ceilings of grid fabric composed of thousands of criss-crossing lines. Sleeping and hanging out under these lines could be your Number One feng-shui problem, leading to apathy and lethargy. How to fix? String a clothesline and hang up some gloves and socks. By breaking up the overhead lines you'll sleep better and wake up ready to go, no matter how early the start.

House your tokens of fame and reputation near your head when you sleep. If — like most climbers — you're already famous in your own mind, then you're set; your fame and reputation exist right in your head, so they're already in the proper place. If you're *certifiably* famous, place your exposé articles, résumé, and full-page North Face ad under your pillow.

So what does all this feng-shui business mean? It means that you have another tool in your alpinist's bag of tricks. Just think:

If you combine feng shui with the newest gear, a stack of skill, and the latest GPS/satellite phone, you cannot go wrong ... right? That new line on Nuptse that thwarted House, Blanchard, Koch, and Prezelj will *finally* be yours.

Majka Burhardt is a writer, guide, and expedition coordinator at the Colorado Mountain School in Estes Park, Colorado. Her alpine-style attempt on Mount Hunter's Moonflower Buttress was aborted due to bad feng shui, and these days she is most easily found on the warm, red sandstone of Eldorado Springs Canyon.

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EVENTS

► May 16-18, New River Gorge, Fayetteville, West Virginia The New Climbers Rendezvous

A three-day climbers' festival to raise money for anchor and trail maintenance at the New, featuring a bouldering competition and plenty of other goings-on.

Contact: www.waterstoneoutdoors.com, (304) 574-2425

► May 17, Minnehaha climbing area, Spokane, Washington Minne-Comp/Festival & Cleanup Day

A clean-up day and friendly competition/festival sponsored by Omega Pacific, Mountain Gear, and the Spokane Mountaineers.

Contact: www.omegapac.com/events.html, (800) 360-3990

COMPETITIONS

Partial 2003 UIAA World Cup Schedule

- May 23-25, Imst, Austria (difficulty)
- May 30-June 1, Yekaterinburg, Russia (boulder, speed)
- June 4, Yekaterinburg, Russia (speed)
- June 7-8, Yekaterinburg, Russia (speed)
- June 13-15, Fiera di Primiero, Italy (boulder)
- June 23, Lecco, Italy (speed)
- June 25-26, Lecco, Italy (boulder)
- June 28-29, Lecco, Italy (difficulty)



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