



Tom Bender and Lane deMoll's Neahkahnie Cottage

Ask architect Tom Bender what the single most important design element is, and he answers without hesitation, "love." He's not paying homage to the 1960s; he really walks his talk. "My intent is always first to create a place with soul." The homes he designs for "ordinary folks" incorporate his three guiding principles: "There's chi, or life force, which is also the energy of a place, li, which is the intent behind the design, and tummy, which means trust your heart, your gut feelings." For years, he has been guided by the principle that it is energy, not matter, that creates space.

Tom has studied sacred spaces and specifically feng shui, the art and science of placing objects to achieve harmony with the environment, since 1970. In 1965 he studied architecture in Japan on a Rockefeller grant and was attracted to the culture's reverence for power spots. He remembers in particular the Kiyomizu Temple: its construction was nearly impossible but was warranted by the sacred space beneath.

Today, along with designing homes, he writes extensively on sacred spaces, creating shrines, and the philosophy and practice of feng shui.

His own home is nestled in between Neahkahnie Mountain and the Pacific Ocean on the Oregon coast. Appropriately, Neahkahnie means "place of the gods," and it was through a kind of divine intervention that Tom and his wife Lane deMoll found it. While living in Portland, the couple visited the coast for a day's hiking trip and came upon the homesite. "It was like the finishing piece of a jigsaw puzzle," Tom explains. "We were totally drawn to the land."

Plans were immediately underway for the 1,200-square-foot cottage that followed the principles of feng shui. Tom points out, for example, that the strong yang (male energy) of the ocean is balanced by the quiet yin (female energy) of the landscaping and house. A sliding wooden door fashioned with a gnarled root handle opens to an interior shoji screen. According to the philosophy of feng shui, the screens afford the entry privacy from both the exterior and the inside living area. Fronting the screens is a wooden wall of recycled chicken coops, the



ABOVE *The cottage has clear cedar-shingle siding and a large "mouth" to breathe in the Pacific Ocean air.* FAR LEFT *The gnarled root door handle was found on the beach below. Tom crafted the shoji screens to keep the entry separate from the living space, an important principle of feng shui.*



*LEFT* Embellishments and furnishings are minimal. Nature provides the artwork.

*BELOW* The wood stove, made from a recycled automobile engine block, warms the house.

*RIGHT* Stones, flowers, bark, and other objects found in nature comprise the centerpiece of the spool table, where family and friends dine. Seating is on the floor, a platform raised slightly to define the space.

wood aged to a deep red with golden hues. The wood stove is a recycled automobile engine block, puffing out enough heat to warm the house.

The Asian philosophy of living simply and in harmony with nature has always made intuitive sense to the Bender/deMoll family. The principles of feng shui take their cues from nature and bring the connection to nature indoors. Much of the philosophy of feng shui also concerns what is *not* seen—or heard. Harsh noises represent sha, or negative energy. Quiet takes priority. There is no television in this house, and even a refrigerator is deemed too noisy. A cupboard that opens from a kitchen corner wall to the outdoors through a series of small holes keeps food cool.

Furnishings are kept simple as well. The family sits on floor cushions to dine around a halved electrical cable spool. The bed is a low futon on the floor. All together, their furnishings would not fill up the average American den; only the chi is abundant.



