

Celebrate Lunar New Year with Feng Shui Year of the Rat

By Joan Stigliano



According to the Chinese calendar, which is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements, Chinese New Year falls on the second new moon after the winter equinox and lasts with celebrations for 15 days. It is a joyous time steeped in tradition with spectacular fireworks, silk lions dancing in the streets and lavish family banquets. Many people around the world will be celebrating the Year of the Earth Rat beginning February 7, 2008. It is believed if you are born in a particular animal year you will have the traits of that animal. The Rat is the first of the twelve animals associated with the Chinese Lunar calendar. People born in the year of the Rat are said to be creative, ambitious, charming and adaptable.

You know you're a Rat if you were born in the years: 2008, 1996, 1984, 1972, 1960, 1948, 1936, 1924.

Chinese New Year or Spring Festival as it is known in the East is one of the happiest times in Asian culture symbolizing family unity, respecting ancestors with ceremonies given in honor of Heaven and Earth.

Start the year with a clean slate:

Prior to the New Year it was customary to sweep and clean your house from top to bottom, with special attention given to the kitchen. This is where you nourish your family and your relationships. You will be sweeping away the old energy and bringing in the new. Try not to sweep any dirt out the door or your luck could go with it !

Symbols of Good Luck & Prosperity

On the eve of the New Year the family would gather for a sumptuous banquet. Some of the foods on the table might be steamed clams, representing being open to good fortune, long noodles for a long life, fried spring rolls resembling gold bricks, a whole fish pronounced *yu*, which is the word for plentiful, and sticky rice balls symbolic of family reunion and happiness.

Auspicious Colors

Red is the color of vitality and life force and symbolizes fire. It is also a protective color. The color is worn during the 15 day festival and used throughout in decorations. Children and adults are given lucky money in red envelopes known as *hungbao*. The money is symbolic of wealth and good fortune for the coming year. Originally red bamboo was burned before gunpowder was invented, but now firecrackers are set off to send the bad luck away and bring in prosperity.

Oranges and Candy

While visiting family or friends during this period of celebration, tangerines and oranges as a gift will be sure to bring them an abundance of happiness. Some

homes even have a whole orange tree that will be decorated. A six sided platter " tray of togetherness" filled with fruits, melon , lotus seeds and candy bring the blessings of riches, longevity, and the wish for many children . Place a bowl with 9 oranges on your counter or table top symbolizing luck to fill your house.

Lantern Festival and Dragon Dance

The Dragon is the most powerful and most protective of the zodiac animals. The Dragon dance along with the Lantern festival under the light of the full moon culminate on the fifteenth day. It is done in the streets with music and cymbals and firecrackers bringing with it good luck and dispelling any negative forces for the coming year.

Feng Shui is the study of the natural flow of elements within the land. As an agrarian culture the Chinese carefully observed the cycles in nature, embraced nature, and most important respected nature. When a family member died a Geomancer was hired to select the proper location and direction for their gravesite.

The belief was that if you took care of your family in death it would be good Karma for you in this lifetime. Departed relatives were remembered with respect for having paved the way for the family. In our media based youth driven culture our elders are looked at as old and not useful any longer. As a New Year resolution why don't you think of an elder in your life who might have inspired you or given you some words of wisdom to live by. Then make a phone call with warm wishes of gratitude or treat them for a homemade dinner or night out. Notice if your luck starts to change this year.

"If there is harmony in the home,
there will be order in the country,
If there is order in the country,

There will be peace in the world "

Chinese proverb

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