

Excerpt from Chapter 1 of *The Well-Centered Home*

What Does It Mean to Become “Centered?”

Being “centered” means that you have returned to an emotional reference point of stability and happiness when the challenges of daily life have knocked you off balance. When your work, family challenges, and the stresses of everyday life pull you in all directions, you need to return to your point of emotional equilibrium. We need to gather ourselves and become centered. Our emotional well-being and our happiness depend on it. Think of it as getting your spirit and psyche “recharged.”

We spend the majority of our lives in our home. It has a significant impact on our state of mind. That impact should be positive, of course. Making your home a “well-centered home” will help you become centered and happy.

What Is the Well-Centered Home?

The well-centered home is one that has been thoughtfully adjusted and fine-tuned to be the most important place that helps you become centered. It is one in which rough spots and negative influences have been removed and the flow of energy has been improved so that the home fulfills its restorative purpose. The well-centered home performs the same task as meditation by grounding and centering you, but it does so in the background. The effects are subliminal. You receive the benefits simply by living there.

You will learn in this book that the well-centered home:

- Provides a centering place in which you are free to live in the moment
- Eliminates friction in the form of distraction and daily annoyances
- Recharges you emotionally as your subconscious self creates a healthy relationship with your home
- Flows smoothly and is free of obstructions that hinder body and spirit
- Recognizes, reinforces, and resonates with life's natural rhythms to promote balance
- Is dynamic and changing, not static or rigid
- Is both anchored to the earth and open to the sky
- Is designed to fit *your* personality and lifestyle, not a prescribed idea of style
- Any home, old or new, big or small, can and should become well-centered.

In a well-centered home, everything feels *right*. Many things contribute to this, including appropriate colors, a sense of scale, and a sense of fluid movement. In almost all the houses I've designed, I've looked for opportunities to present a view that captures your attention as you move about the space. For example, you may round a corner on the way to the bedroom and be presented with a work of art, or perhaps a Zen window that frames a lovely view. When properly arranged, this moment triggers your inner consciousness to go directly to that object, and you become less aware of your physical body as you walk along your path. That shedding of the consciousness is similar to what meditation does, and you are freer to enjoy living.

The way we design and arrange our homes really does have the power to do this. We often think only in terms of our five senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—but humans are sensitive to many other influences. For example, we have a sense of appropriate scale that dictates our comfort in certain places. Standing alone on the floor of an empty basketball arena creates a distinctly uncomfortable feeling for most of us because the scale of the space is far too cavernous for one person. On the other hand, a restaurant booth is a sought-after seat because it perfectly fits a group of four and provides a bit of coziness in an otherwise open restaurant. There is a definition of the appropriate size space for the function.

We may lack language for some of the feelings that architecture inspires in us, but scientists are beginning to measure these effects. For example, studies have shown that patients in hospital rooms with views of nature heal faster and have fewer complications than those who had a view of a brick wall. When no natural view is possible, even having access to artwork that depicts nature helps to reduce anxiety and lower pain responses.¹ Architecture has the power to influence how we feel, so why not harness that power in our homes?

The Benefits of a Well-Centered Home

The primary purpose of creating a well-centered home is to improve your emotional wellbeing. The well-centered home nudges you in the direction of happiness and provides a space where you can be emotionally and mentally present.

¹ Deborah Franklin, "How Hospital Gardens Help Patients Heal," *Scientific American*, March 1, 2012, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nature-that-nurtures/>

In the medical world, doctors observe the Hippocratic oath: First, do no harm. Taking care of your emotional wellbeing through architecture is similar in that the first step is to remove the harmful elements of an unbalanced home. In the case of your home, harmful elements are things that create disturbances to your peace of mind. Some are obvious, like replacing burned-out light bulbs in a dim hallway. The lack of light you experience on your path through this area draws your attention, either consciously or subconsciously, away from your purpose and causes you to feel irritated and unhappy. Solving this problem eliminates the aggravation and allows you to continue living your life, smoothing the path before you and creating that feeling of balance.

Of course, not all disturbances are as easy to recognize—if they were, we'd all be living in well-centered homes (with fully operational light bulbs) already! But consider the example of the light bulbs. Replacing the bulbs will remove a disturbance, but there's also an opportunity to *improve* the lighting so it has a positive impact on you. Will you choose bulbs that emit harsh, agitating light, or will you choose bulbs with a warmer color hue (called the color temperature) that softens the space and adds a welcoming glow to that hallway? You may not be consciously aware of it, but most people are quite sensitive to the color temperature of their bulbs, and making this simple change can help you relax at home—instead of feeling like you're trapped in an office with greenish-blue fluorescent lighting.

And don't worry if you're not familiar with color temperature and light bulb types—I'll talk more about how to work with lighting to channel your home's energy in Chapter 10.

As the simple example of the light bulb shows, the well-centered home offers practical benefits, as well as some which are less readily definable. Removing disturbances

and creating balance often involves making your home function better. From fixing a leaky faucet to remove the annoying sound of the drip, to organizing your mudroom to make mornings more seamless, the well-centered home supports you in your daily activities in endless practical ways.

Finally, there are aesthetic benefits to the well-centered home. These are closely related to the emotional benefits, as beauty makes people feel good. But in the well-centered home, beauty arises from harmony and balance. No particular style or look dictates the layout of the home—instead, the home is designed to serve the emotional and practical needs of the people living in it.

Too often, architects are trained to design objects. They're obsessed with materials and geometric forms, which leads to making buildings or homes that are just avant garde sculptures. They're incredible to look at, but they're completely detached from the needs of the people who inhabit them. Open up any magazine devoted to modern home design, and you'll see what I mean. It's beautiful, but often unlivable.

In my view, architecture should be about understanding the type and quality of space we want to live in and how we want to feel inside of it. The job of the architect is to define the edges of that space and give it a tangible shape and character—not just to build a beautiful shell. Architecture is much more than merely a giant sculpture. The well-centered home is a place that harnesses the energy around you to suit your needs. In some places, it will delight and energize you; in others, it will calm and restore you. But always, *you* are at the center of the well-centered home.

¹ Deborah Franklin, "How Hospital Gardens Help Patients Heal," *Scientific American*, March 1, 2012,
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nature-that-nurtures/>