

Nest Building

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Asymmetry, Impermanence, Imperfection & Change

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Those of us in the western hemisphere have never been shy about commandeering a philosophical design tenet from another culture, reducing it down to a slick package and remarketing it on our own terms.

For example, *Feng Shui*, which originated in China, is the study of the placement of physical objects and their effect on personal energy flow in living and working environments.

When North America grabbed hold of it, many of us thought that all we had to do was put a mirror in a strategic spot somewhere in our house and all our riches would cease to escape through the back door! In truth, however, *Feng Shui* was never intended to be a quick fix, a fashion statement, or a lucrative marketing scam.

Similarly, 'Zen' is not for sale either, despite the proliferation of Zen-labeled products available in stores across the continent. Zen represents the pursuit of enlightenment through meditation and inner contemplation—it cannot be found in physical objects such as picture frames and vases.

Wabi-Sabi, a Japanese discipline, has yet to appear on the shelves of your local home improvement shop, but is a particularly significant belief in view of the catastrophes that have recently befallen Japan, Haiti, Thailand and other parts of the world.

Wabi-Sabi is defined as “a comprehensive Japanese ... aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience ... sometimes described as one of beauty that is *imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete*”. (Source: Wikipedia)

Wabi-Sabi allows us to officially embrace impermanence, humility, asymmetry and imperfection, permitting them to flourish in our lives and our living spaces.

In its purest form, of course, it is far more than a style: it is a state of mind calling upon an inner quietude and a willingness to see what cannot always be seen.

The Japanese are an orderly people and yet they have always accepted these principles that confirm instability and flaws. The recent earthquakes and tsunami were brutal reminders that on a global scale nothing remains the same for long; but this is also something we need to recognize closer to home in our domestic spaces. Perfection is rarely attainable and even if you catch a glimpse of it for a moment, all too quickly it is disturbed and you are back to chasing after it.

Wabi-Sabi on the home front means accepting that:

- ~ **nothing ever stays the same** – the roof will eventually have to be replaced.
- ~ **we cannot control everything** – the kids will inevitably kick their muddy boots off in the middle of the hall way!
- ~ **not all things are predictably symmetrical** – the cedar tree to the left of the front door is slightly rounder than the one on the right.
- ~ **imperfection is both enchanting and interesting** – those scratches on the coffee table are there to remind us that life is lived fully in this house.

Phew! It sure takes a lot of pressure off, don't you think?