



# INSPIRATION REPORT

ISSUE 27  
FALL 2020



## EURO CRAFTSMAN PROJECT

An exercise in how NOT to hit a "home run."

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# *Feng Shui & Timber Design*

## *Methodology*

WRITTEN BY BERT SARKKINEN

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### *Understanding the Perspective, Mindset & Process of True Masters*

The choices you make with your timber framing package choice will significantly impact the **look and feel** of your home, pavilion, recreation center, storefront, or whatever your project may be. Feng Shui is an easy target for ridicule, but its principles are universal with good planning and design. **I learned this the hard way.**

Many years ago, I laughed in glorious mirth, hearing about a Feng Shui experience a couple I know had. Let's call this couple Betty Sue and Frank. One day, Frank happened to come home early mid-morning, and there was a strange vehicle parked in the driveway. (This isn't what you think it is!) "I wonder what is up?" Frank wondered. Boy, was he in for a surprise. Frank walked in the door to see Betty Sue's face red with embarrassment. "This is Bob, and he is here for a Feng Shui consulting session.." she stammered. Betty Sue had said nothing about this to Frank. She had intended to hide this curiosity expense in the miscellaneous column.

"Aah," said Frank. "You are here to help us rearrange the furniture?" Bob smiled and replied, "I see, by your statement, you know something of Feng Shui." Bob then continued with his consultation. But Bob completely missed his audience. Frank and Betty Sue could hardly keep a polite, straight face listening to Bob's zany vocabulary and suggestions! Frank worried about getting canker sores, having had to bite his cheek so much to prevent rude laughter. Frank and Betty Sue could not even look at each other! Working together on the budget days later, Frank and Betty Sue decided the Feng Shui expense should be allocated to the entertainment column for the joy it provided.



Since then, I have become more aware and in touch with universal principles governing beauty, balance, and harmony. I wonder if I would laugh as hard if I heard the aforementioned Feng Shui story for the first time today? But there are two critical takeaways to extract from this story that relates directly to your Hybrid Timber Framing package:

1. How to recognize phony design gobbledygook, which can lead you astray from getting a look and feel that delights for decades.
2. How to blend these universal truths regarding aesthetics, energy, harmony, magnetism, etc. with your style preferences.

## Phony Design Gobbledygook

According to my friend “Frank,” the Feng Shui consultant was far from being an expert. He based this conclusion on two main observations:

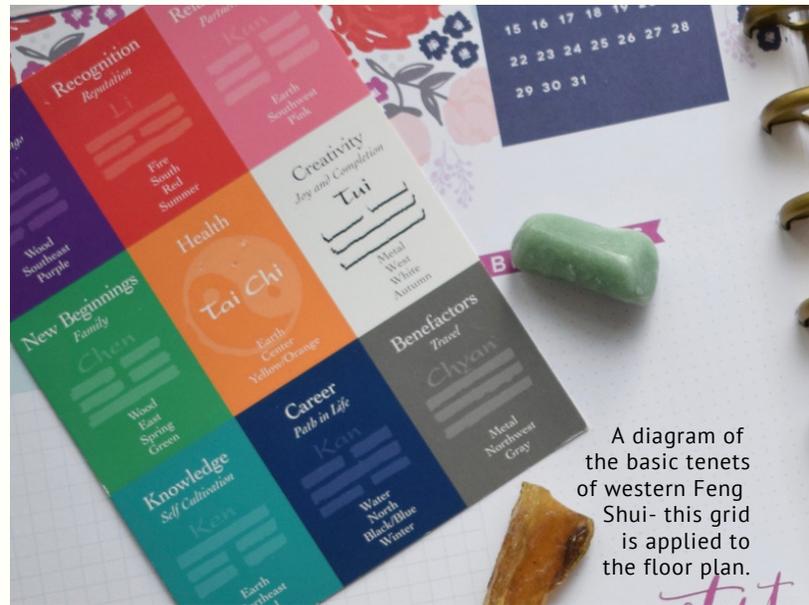
**1) Bob’s inability to connect and explain Feng Shui’s beauty and energy principles on Frank and Betty Sue’s level.** A true expert can simplify and apply complex disciplines in a meaningful and impactful way. They make it look easy! Bob’s choice of words sounded like rote textbook literature. While presumably correct with Feng Shui principles, Bob’s message was unable to convey understanding correctly. A seasoned practitioner of any vocation will “borrow” vocabulary from their audience to keep the message relevant and practical.

**2) The awkward, ill-fitting solutions Bob proposed.** I had to chuckle. Frank ended up planting a tree in the middle of his front lawn per Bob’s suggestion and at the insistent behest of Betty Sue. The tree looked randomly placed and awkward- without rhyme or reason. But it did follow a Feng Shui principle of creating rectangles. The tree’s apparently random location intersected with the two outermost front and side walls of Frank’s home. This tree then made the flow and balanced the energy. But according to Frank, it built a dam blocking flow- As in, “This damn tree gets in the way of mowing!”

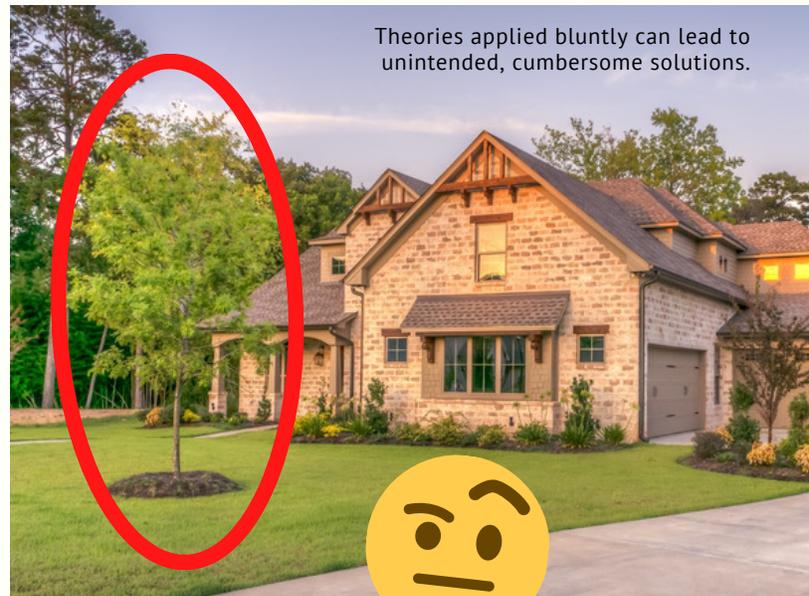
All kidding aside, this textbook principle applied without understanding or mastery, resulted in wasted resources and poor aesthetics. It took Betty Sue a few years to agree that the tree-in-the-yard-solution to balance energy had the opposite effect. The tree was eventually removed.



An expert knows how to translate their deep knowledge into terms that directly help the situation at hand.



A diagram of the basic tenets of western Feng Shui- this grid is applied to the floor plan.



Theories applied bluntly can lead to unintended, cumbersome solutions.

While there are service charlatans intentionally mixing universal truths with their gobbledygook, I believe most phony design jargon comes from well-intentioned incompetence, as depicted with consultant Bob. In Bob's case, he appeared to lack experience and mastery.

A master, however, is not free from mistakes, uttering design gobbledygook or missing the audience. A master is both humble and aware. A master knows that many bad ideas, themes, and even missed communication are an inherent part of the process and eventually lead to reasonable solutions. A master uses intuition and brute force- intuition for creativity and applying sound design principles and brute force to doggedly keep proposing ideas until balance is reached. Masters also can step back and "see the forest." They can help with the selection of suitable solutions and options. A master is not afraid of mistakes and serves as an insightful guide. They also know when to stop.

## *How to Apply Universal Truths to Your Style?*

The obvious and easy answer is to hire correctly and get the right people on your team. We hope to be on your team if we are the right fit for your project, but scheduling is getting further and further out. For now, I can give you two fantastic tools that are used by masters of all different stripes. The "technical" names of these two principles are:

1. The "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach"
2. Make flubbing-up your friend

The "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" is a tool you'll want to keep handy for making good decisions during your building or remodeling process. To use the "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach," cover one eye and squint with the other eye until the object you are observing becomes a bit fuzzy or blurred. Now you can look for the gestalt or "the thingness of the thing" you are scrutinizing. Some people say they look for the essence. Others say look and feel. But regardless, when you make it impossible to see fine detail, you can better see the big picture.

The "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" could also be called the zoom-in, zoom-out method. Referring to this principle as the "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" emphasizes the importance of zooming-out and the difficulty of doing so in life regarding difficult decisions.

In my world, as a guide helping people get the right look and feel using Post and Beam construction, the "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" is used in the initial brainstorm where we get a good understanding of what people are trying to achieve and why. We ask a lot of questions and take notes. Many clients don't have a clear understanding of WHAT and WHY, so a lot of time can be focused on the details before a clear picture emerges.

Once we are working with the client's 3-D model and testing ideas, we do not have to cover one eye and squint. We can simply scroll out until it is impossible to focus on the smaller details leaving us with the silhouette, massing, and overall feel. We then zoom in and work with the details of alignment, timber sizing, proportions, roof slopes, building constraints, and of course, the projected money investment. Then we zoom back out to observe overall alignment with the client's goals, unobscured by overwhelming detail. Then zoom back in again. In. Out. In. Out- the process is repeated countless times until we cross the finish line!

The "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" helps prep the canvas for beautiful timber design.



Multiple ideas come from allowing the fuzzy image to come into focus. Not all are great- but admitting when ideas fall short will help inform the good ones to come.





Beauty, balance, and harmony- the universal principles shared by Feng Shui applied to timber framing yields amazing results.

For the overall best results, clients use this process for all the other major building decisions they must make. I'm positive you already use this principle in your life to some degree. My exhortation to you is to use it intentionally, more often, and with more awareness.

## *Make Flubbing-up Your Friend*

"Success has a thousand fathers, and failure is an orphan." This famous quote by John F. Kennedy pretty much sums up our gut reaction towards failure. Who wants it? It feels bad. It feels like I'm losing. It is moving backward. It is embarrassing and possibly shameful... so why do masters make flubbing-up their friend? Wouldn't it be counterproductive? No, and here is why.

As mentioned earlier, masters understand that idea failure leads to good ideas. By being OK with failure, they remove the influence of fear from their work - akin to walking a tightrope with a safety net. They can stay loose and do their best work. But making flubbing-up your friend is much easier said than done. You will deal with frustration, sadness, and anger to tame the primary urges and feelings that make flubbing-up your enemy.

As someone starting the building process, flubbing-up can take many forms. On a small scale, it can be buying the wrong light fixture or overpaying for a faucet. On a big scale, it can be hiring the wrong person or contractor.

## **“What can you do to minimize the fear of regret?”**

I encourage you to find and use thought exercises to help you stay loose when making decisions. I also encourage you to read chapter five of our new book. It deals with making the right hiring choices. Nobody will die if you make a wrong hiring choice, but the right hiring choice is a whole lot easier and generally a much better investment. That brings us to the final thing masters do. They explore (fail) with a lot of ideas before choosing the best option.

We started this article poking fun at Feng Shui, but we have all experienced the universal truths of beauty, balance, and harmony in our lives. Balance and harmony also apply to the process, mindset, and observations to make good decisions. Be neither petrified nor fearless. Do your due diligence. Select the team members who fit you and your project well. Make decisions with their help and enjoy the results, knowing that absolute perfection is unattainable.

But by using the "fuzzy-one-eyed-approach" and by making flubbing-up your friend, you can stack the success cards in your favor.

To your momentum and success!  
On behalf of the ATF Team,

Bert Sarkkinen

# EURO CRAFTSMAN PROJECT IN RIDGEFIELD, WA



I would love to tell you how infallible the ATF team is and how you can expect a dramatic “home run” with everything we do. That is not the case. Sometimes we have to do the hard work and walk the ball through the infield, through the outfield and drop it over the fence.

The outcome is the same. The “home run” (artistic, balanced timbers that provide long-term value) is achieved, but the hard work is painfully evident without fanfare. This “home run” does not portray us as outstanding, brave heroes- but that is OK. “Call a spade, a spade,” I say. We are not the heroes. You and clients like the owners of this project need to be firmly in the hero's seat. Our job is to act as creative guides who can competently perform the required work.

With this particular project, the hard work occurred amidst stages of communication throughout the project. I was unclear explaining and confirming the details of what would be included and how much money would have to be invested. Part of the confusion was caused by over communication. Things moved from simple to complex... “Boo! Hiss! Thumbs Down!” Another communication glitch happened with the framers who installed the timbers.

The particulars of this miscommunication and resulting problems are not important. What is important is that we learned from this experience and took ownership. We apologized and suggested adding interior timbers for the owners of this project- at no additional cost. This gesture moved and delighted them!

Now, if that is not a long educational walk to manually achieve a “home run,” I don't know it is! It is also worth noting how the pain of fixing has disappeared for both the clients and us. We both have good memories. Sometimes in life, we must create our “home runs” the hard way.





# GETTING TO KNOW

## Damen Hanson



Thinking about Damen, I am reminded of some advice I received from a contractor many years ago. He said: "Ask potential hires if they play sports." Sage advice. Damen plays sports- this means he knows about teamwork, goal-oriented instruction, practice, and focus. He also has a desire to win and likes physical activity. All these things required to enjoy sports are in alignment with work artisans do at ATF. Damen loves to hunt as well and has been doing so since he was a youngster. In my opinion, hunting could easily be swapped out with playing sports as a hiring metric. This double alignment means Damen is in the right place. Also, Damen's coworkers have noticed an ability to listen (the gift of listening is no small thing) and a willingness to help out in any way he can. We all appreciate the addition of young blood like Damen!

### **What would you like people to know about your past?**

I was born and raised in South Dakota for the 1st ten years of my life before my family moved to Oregon.

### **Where is a place you would like to visit?**

I would love to go to Europe and see all the World War II sites.

### **How do you like to spend your free time?**

I have always loved hunting and spending time in the forest. Recently, I found that I enjoy backpacking in the mountains. I also appreciate a good game of golf.

### **What would have to happen in the next three years to make you feel like you are moving forward?**

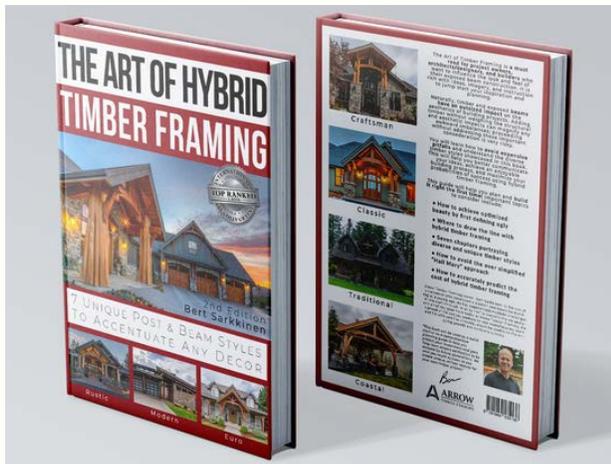
As long as I am bettering myself and my skills with work, hunting, and family, I feel like I would be moving forward.

# MEMORY LANE



I remember spending a lot of time wood carving as a youngster. I still don't understand the motivation behind my endeavors, but it was a fun hobby. Most of the carvings were lost or given as gifts. I do regret not having saved the chess set I made around the age of 12. My father made a set of long octagonal blanks from basswood, which I carved into the 32 chess pieces. I also made a chessboard from oak and walnut in the school shop class. It took time, toil, and blood. During one whittling session, an octagonal piece rolled under intense downward cutting pressure, and the carving

knife plunged through my thumbnail and stuck into the wood table-- But it was still fun! It is funny how I did not value any of those projects moving into my later teens. The chess set disappeared from my life without me knowing when or how. I suspect that I permitted my younger siblings to use the game at some point. Likely, pieces were misplaced, and things took their course from there. I don't blame anyone, as even hoarders can't hang on to everything forever. Perhaps it would be fun to carve another set just for old times' sake?



## Sneak Preview

We've been hard at work updating a book we published a couple years ago about what we love to do- Hybrid Timber Framing. The 2nd edition is revised and expanded with new information and updated photography. The official launch of this refreshed version is still a few months away, but we'd love to offer an advance PDF version for you read in the meantime. After your review is posted we will need your mailing address to send you a free signed copy of the book.

1-833-212-0202 [design@arrowtimber.com](mailto:design@arrowtimber.com)

Also, available for preorder on Amazon.com

## YOUR REFERRALS SPEAK VOLUMES!



...and are **GREATLY** appreciated. When you refer friends and acquaintances to ATF, make sure they mention your name! **They get to skip the screening process...** and yes, we screen clients. You are the cream of the crop! Plus, we want to know where to send thanks... do you prefer coffee or sweets?



# FEATURED READING AND VIEWING



## Good to Great

by Jim Collins

**GRADE: A+**

Lessons from this book are still with me even though I read it years ago. Phrases like productive paranoia and 20 Mile March are deeply engrained in mind. The first chapter always sends a shiver down my spine! It is a message of preparation and discipline intertwined with a true story contrasting the strategy and mindset of two teams competing to plant a flag at the South Pole. It will probably shine a light on your thinking errors and failings, making you squirm a bit... it certainly did for me! I concede that this book exposed my shortcomings as a leader while giving great insight for improvements and hope of change- which generally comes slowly. If change comes fast, it is usually associated with a hefty dose of pain! This book seems to illuminate the middle ground.

## TFG: Heavy Timber Truss Webinar

by Ben Brungraber

**GRADE: A+**

For those wanting a fast glimpse of what a day in the life of a timber frame structural engineer looks like, this webinar delivers. The content is advanced, as it is geared for members of the *Timber Frame Guild*. I recall a fellow Timber Framer saying: "I attended Ben's virtual seminar on heavy timber truss considerations. Didn't understand a word of it. Yet oddly, it was worth every minute—like all of Ben's presentations." The presentation is fast-paced, opinionated, and full of examples of pitfalls to be alert to and avoid. I especially enjoyed how Ben mixed past events and frustrations into this webinar.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIwBoNgJqJo>

# HAPPINESS IS...

It is incredible how many things in our lives must meet or exceed a minimum threshold to achieve the ever-elusive feeling of happiness. This generalization would not apply if, for example, you had just been pulled from the brink of death. Then the presence of pain, cold, frustration, hunger, or worries would not even make a dent in your feeling of happiness at that moment! But in our everyday life, things like an accomplishment, connection, and purpose need to reach a certain level to

feel fulfilling. Before concerns like acceptance or belonging, the essential survival checkboxes of food, sleep, comfort, and security have to be ticked off. A lot of things have to align to be happy: "To have mostly positive thoughts, in most situations, for most of the time." One easy way to instantly derail this happiness requirement train is to binge on food or beverages that do not agree with my body. Presto! Instant dark mood and grey pallor over everything!

# ...EATING RIGHT

# THE ARROW TIMBER PHILOSOPHY

People want things which reflect their personality.

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People want an enjoyable process with a mutual exchange.

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People want teamwork, transparency, and creative solutions.

I experience this over and over in the course of a year, not only when clients view albums or 3-D models in my office, but especially so immediately after the completion of their timber structure. **Appreciative head nods and slow smiles have almost become a trademark!** I fell in love with the timber framing craft in 2002 and I still feel just as privileged and enthused. Many, many, personalized structures have been created since then. In fact, my **passion, artistry, and repertoire of creative solutions** have all grown dramatically... I sometimes wonder if it is simply something to do with rising to challenges and building upon success. You probably agree that exposed beams provide geometric beauty and resonate deep within our psyche... The style brings to mind **durability, longevity, safety, laughter, smiles, and home to many warm feelings.**

## THE QUESTION

What is the best way for you to acquire your personalized timber living?

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Not too much, not too little. Not too high, not too low. Just the right mix of timber presence and style... How to find that sweet spot which you can enjoy for years and pass on to your heirs. It's really about enriching the lives of those around you and sharing your unique personality and viewpoints with them. **Who is the best fit for your project?**

Seek out and choose, therefore, things that will evoke head nods and slow smiles. Things which resonate with your personality. Things that do not grow old or boring with the passage of time. You will not regret it.

*To your goals, momentum, and happiness*



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bert".

Bert Sarkkinen, Owner

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