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From The Times

February 14, 2007

This is LA, so even monkeys in zoo get feng shui adviser



Chris Ayres in Los Angeles

With cats on Prozac, bunnies in sex therapy and dogs getting massages, the City of Los Angeles has taken the logical next step: hired a feng shui consultant to help to design a \$7.4 million (£3.8 million) enclosure for three rare golden monkeys at Los Angeles Zoo.

The enclosure for the monkeys, one male and two females, has been designed to look like a rural Chinese village, with a roof made from large mesh netting draped over posts. Inside are several artificial trees suitable for climbing. There will also be sleeping quarters for the monkeys, and a viewing platform for the public.

The feng shui expert is an architect called Simona Mainini, based in Beverly Hills. She was paid a reported \$4,500 for her work, the first feng shui deal for any zoo in America. Ms Mainini, originally from Italy and a senior instructor with the American Feng Shui Institute as well as an author and a lecturer at UCLA, said that she researched the habits of the monkeys by interviewing zoo employees, and did not so much change the design of the enclosure as make small tweaks to achieve “good qi” [pronounced chee].

For example, designers put the observation tower door in an unfavourable area, increasing the potential for accidents, lawsuits and arguments. She recommended that they move the door or add a fountain or water feature to “soften, with moisture, the harsh energy” in that area of the tower.

She also suggested that the designers should rotate the monkey holding building, to put it on a different angle. That would “transform the energy distribution” of the building and result in a “stronger potential for health and well-being”.

It would also promote fertility — important for a species with

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fewer than 10,000 left in the wild.

"It's very experimental," Ms Mainini told the *Daily Breeze*. "We don't have any books on feng shui for monkeys. We have to assume that Darwin is correct and that there is a connection and what is good for humans is good for monkeys." The golden monkeys will be lent to Los Angeles from China as part of a ten-year deal under which the city's former mayor agreed to pay \$100,000 a year for monkey research.

The species is easily recognisable by the blue faces, matching blue genitals, catlike meowing noises and long hair, which can make them look as though they have wings when they leap from tree to tree.

They each weigh about 13kg (30lb) and dine mainly on foliage. Typically, they live in groups of about 600, but hunting and deforestation is threatening to wipe out the species.

John Lewis, the general manager of the zoo, said: "The idea is to get people beyond looking at the animals so they experience how the animals and people live." The three monkeys are due to arrive in Los Angeles by the end of the year.

HAVE YOUR SAY

I couldn't stop laughing reading this. It just goes to show that even a venerable institution such as a zoo sometimes suffers from mental constipation & makes gross errors in judgement with someone else's money, not just the government. What a silly waste of money hiring a snake oil merchant.

Eric, San Diego, u.s.a.

As a feng shui expert I know that animals have figured out a long time ago how to live in harmony with the environment (this is what feng shui is all about).The human race is just beginning to understand how to do that especially after the ecological disasters we're witnessing now. I was asked to comment about monkeys and their habitat in a zoo in LA from a feng shui perspective on BBC New 24 a few weeks ago. We could learn a thing or two from nature. Feng shui was best defined by Winston Churchill who said 'We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us.' The latest research suggests that successful people have a very supportive environment, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In short, feng shui is a physical affirmation of life.

Jan Cisek <http://www.fengshuilondon.net/>, London,

Helen is heading in the right direction. But perhaps we Angelenos need to worry as much about the feeding and care of our fellow humans as well "other life forms" as the publically funded LA Zoo worries about monkeys. Ms. Mainini's \$4,500 fee could have gone a long way towards setting up a homeless family in a clean and safe apartment away from LA's dangerous sidewalk encampments.

Carlo Nessuno, Los Angeles, CA

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