

[Book Journeys](#) Interview - Feb 19, 2015

Dr. Angela Lauria with Hope Karan Gerecht, author of *Healing Design: Practical Feng Shui for Healthy and Gracious Living*

People who are writing know their subject intimately better than anyone that they're gonna be dealing with. So I would suggest that they really tune in to the message that they're trying to portray and find a way to make it so crystal clear in the title that that's what's going on. ~Hope Karan Gerecht

Angela:

Well, hey everybody! It is another week of Book Journeys Radio. I am so excited to have you all with us. Every week, as you know, on Book Journeys we talk to an author about their experience writing, publishing and promoting their book so that you can learn hopefully from the things they did right and maybe from their mistakes too. This week is no exception. We are talking to Hope Karan Gerecht. Hope is the author of *Healing Design: Practical Feng Shui for Healthy and Gracious Living*. Hope, thank you for being with us today.

Hope:

Thanks for the invitation to be here.

Angela:

So let's just start by talking about your book, *Healing Design*. Tell us what it's about.

Hope:

Well, my book was one of the first feng shui books to bring together more than one system of feng shui. And it's really about how to recreate an environment that supports us body, mind, and spirit.

Angela:

Oh, I love that.

Hope:

Thank you.

Angela:

And who is your book targeted to help?

Hope:

Well, it's really for both homes and businesses. Wherever a person is spending time, we can do different design techniques that really are about creating more health, happiness, and prosperity. That's the whole goal behind feng shui.

Angela:
I love that!

Hope:
Yeah.

Angela:
So, yeah. Let's talk a little bit, before we get into your process of writing your book, let's talk a little bit about what feng shui is and what it isn't, for people who might not be familiar.

Hope:
Sure. Well the term itself, feng shui, means wind and water, and that name of the art was chosen to picturize that we're not in the static environment. Everything is in motion. The air that we breathe, you can tap on your desk and while it feels solid, it's actually molecules of matter surrounded by a greater amount of space, and that space has energy. So the Chinese figured out a way to understand space the same way an acupuncturist will understand how energy moves in a person's body. And that's what it's about, it's about keeping it moving, keeping it healthy, elevating it, evolving it. And everything that we do to our environment, it's like the next layer of skin outside of our body and that's helping us to evolve our own lives forward.

Angela:
Well, why did you decide to write this as a book? I'm gonna guess that you had some expertise in feng shui first.

Hope:
Yes.

Angela:
But tell us why you wrote the book.

Hope:
Sure. I went to college for Interior Design and at the end of my four years, I was in a health food store and I had that experience of, you know, the idea that a book jumps off the shelf at you. I saw, I had no idea what feng shui was, this is in the late '80s, and there was just a little pictograph of a house on the spine with the term *feng shui*. And I snapped it up just because there was a drawing of a house. And within five minutes of looking through, and this was the first book that made it to the U.S. in the 80s on feng shui, within a few minutes, that light bulb went off over my head and I said, "Oh my heaven. This is what I was really looking for!" And I remember thinking at that moment that interior design is like icing on the cake and feng shui is the cake.

Angela:
Hmmm.

Hope:

So I set about studying feng shui and I would say about ten years in, I felt like I had, my pitcher was full and I needed to pour some off into a book to share with other people. And that made room in my own inner process, my own psyche and soul, to continue to feed myself new information.

Angela:

Huh! And so why, so why this book, and I actually, when did you publish this book?

Hope:

It came out in '99.

Angela:

Okay, wow! So uhm...

Hope:

I told the publisher that I thought it would take me nine months to write the book. I had this grand plan that I would travel to eight different projects and write while I was on the plane. And of course, the best laid plans, right? None of that happened. I would do a project, I'd be wiped out, I would get myself on the plane and I would crash out with the magazine. So my nine-month plan turned into two and a half years. (laughs)

Angela:

(laughs) So you had a patient publisher.

Hope:

I did. Uhm, they were pretty used to authors not meeting their deadlines, I have to say. It was Charles Tuttle in Boston and thankfully they didn't give me too much of a hard time.

Angela:

And so what came first for you? Walk us through what your journey was between when you decided to write your book, did you get an agent first? Did you get a publisher? What was the order of the ...?

Hope:

You know it's very bizarre and I don't even quite know how to put it into words and I'm sure as I put it into words, some of the special aspects of it will be lost. But I was speaking to a manager of a store and telling them that I was teaching feng shui and this manager let me know that she was about to quit her job and go to work for a local publisher in Baltimore where I live. And I just, what happens then, said, "Oh, well let them know that you know someone who would like to write a book on feng shui." So two weeks later, three weeks la-, I mean just on a lot, it just sort of like an angel whispered in my ear. I don't even know exactly how that chain of events unfolded. So I just, you know, that just came out of my mouth and she called me about three weeks later, and she said, "You know what? There's a woman here who asked me if I know

anyone writing any books.” And at that point in time this publisher in Baltimore was focusing on children’s books. So this woman who was an editor there was just about to step into the world of becoming a book agent. And again, like why she would ask this newbie at her company, “Do you know anyone writing a book?” And the newbie says, “I happen to know someone who wants to write a book on feng shui.” And the woman says, “I love feng shui. There’s not that much out there on it. I need to speak to this woman.” So I speak to the editor and we get together three or four times and we mock up a presentation and when I say we mock up a presentation, it still shocks me when I look back at how professional this little eight-page presentation. It literally was like four-color printing, typeset, examples of my writing, a picture or two, a chart or two. And it was like a tiny mini-version of this dream book and I just again happen to know a few people who connected me in with a local print house that just wanted to help a girl out and gave me this ridiculously low price to mock up this sample. And so, so we make about ten packages and my editor-newly-turning agent takes it to the Chicago Book Fair and gets two companies instantly interested. And I’m just shaking my head thinking, *I know this isn’t how it typically goes*. I think people were sending proposals out left and right and getting rejection letters. And it just was really like this little, uhm, like divine magical path that is just mind-blowing to this day how that came together.

Angela:

Wow! Yeah, don’t try that at home. I don’t know that’s so easy to pull off these days. So what, so okay, so that was all before you wrote the book. What happened next, you had a nine-month timeline obviously. You went a little over but what was your writing process like?

Hope:

You know, it was really wild. It was well before voice-to-text was popular. Dragonspeak was just hitting the scene but, you know, rife with problems. So I had my trusty little cassette tape recorder and I began to sense about how many chapters I wanted the book to consist of and I made a separate cassette tape for each chapter. And of course, you know, you seldom get enough of an advance and that has gotten only worse now. You never get enough of an advance, you just quit your day job and just focus on writing. So I was still working at my own business, I’ve been doing feng shui for 30 years now. And I would get up like 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning because I’m more of a morning person and I would sit at my desk and work for one to two hours but the interesting trick was, I never knew what chapter I was going to work on. I literally sat there and stayed in this kind of open, not really a meditative place but just an open-hearted place where I was present, where I just was curious. That’s probably the best word - curious. And I would sit there until I got some sort of inner prompting which chapter I had any energy to work on and that’s where I’d pop that tape in and I would just go to work talking my book because I really got that working on the computer and writing happened for me on different sides of the brain. And if I was busy typing things out on the computer, my left brain was very active and I needed, you know I just needed to stay so into the flow of stream of consciousness. Now I think one could probably do that with the voice-to-text stuff that all phones and iPads and tablets have now. But just speaking in conversational style, I would go off on these related tangents that were like a dance of a ballerina and nothing as planned as I would have done had I been following an outline and, you know, and done it more left-brain style.

Angela:
Hmm. I love that!

Hope:
Yeah.

Angela:
And then you have, ah, was there an editing process that your publisher took you through? Or did you have an independent editor?

Hope:
There was a nightmare of an editing process. I will never ever do it this way again. In fact, I have just been reticent to write again. It's finally, you know, 16 years later, I'm finally, like my heart is ready to face that daunting process again because it is a very solitary process and you just go so deep within your being, it just draws so much. So I finished the whole book, got it to the editor, and I would say a few weeks later, I get the entire book back all red-lined and not simple things, like you know, that I could just change a word. It was, you know, I call feng shui the "tao of design," t-a-o, so that's sort of just "the way of design" or "the path of design." So I call it the "tao of design" and they red-marked in there, "Please explain." And so every red mark, like every one of the 11 chapters had just dozens of these...

Angela:
A massacre? A massacre occurred on your pages?

Hope:
Yes, exactly! And they wanted it back like in 2 or 3 weeks. So the first thing I had to do was go out and have a chocolate sundae. I just had to deal with it that way, just like escape from even thinking about this editing. And again, here I am working full-time and they want it back in a couple of weeks so I kept track, (clears throat) pardon me. It took me a hundred and twenty hours to do the editing that they asked for.

Angela:
That's probably more time than it took to write it.

Hope:
Shoot! No, no. It took about 2,000 hours to write my book. Again, I will never do it that way again, but that's what it took.

Angela:
Well, as a percentage then, that much editing really isn't, as a total hour count it's crazy. But as a percentage of your writing time, it's pretty nor-, that says, you know I always say 10 to 20% so that's not bad.

Hope:

I see. Right. And I will take my hat off to editors because I thought I created this really wonderful book and after it was edited, it was such a jam. It was so much better and more clear and more elegant and so I admire editors greatly.

Angela:

Yes. So let's get some advice from you then 'cause you sound like a perfect person to learn from. What advice do you give people about working with an editor, looking for an editor to work with? What if you wrote another book, how would you do the editing experience differently?

Hope:

Sure. Uhm, well I went out with my husband to hear some music about a year ago and just was introduced to the girlfriend of a friend of my husband's. And she turns out, it turns out that she's an editor. She works primarily on more non-fiction books, which mine was as well, but she works more on like scientific journals. But I had such a good conversation with her. You know we were at the same table for maybe an hour and I could just tell that this was a woman who thinks outside of the box, who has kind of an unusual take on her approach to life. And I thought, you know, if ever I need another editor I will probably contact this woman because I don't feel like I'm cut from a normal, you know, clause in society, in Western society. My thinking is much more Eastern. So I think, uhm, a person should really be able to track with you. I think that an editor needs to be open. They're not the final word. They certainly can bring a number of suggestions to the table but it really needs to sit well within the writer's belly. And I think I was very fortunate with the editor that my publisher chose. Uhm, she was open when I didn't, the lion's share of what she recommended I really liked but there were a few things where I just put my foot down and I said, "What you're suggesting is really taking the heart out of what I'm trying to say, and I must say it the way I'm saying it." So, and she got that so, you know, so I don't mind debating with someone if they're willing to respect the writer as the ultimate authority. Uhm, I will, I will...

Angela:

Yeah, I think it's always you have to be clear. So when you know, know it has to be this way, uhm...

Hope:

Right, right.

Angela:

Right. Then it makes it easier to know where to cut the line.

Hope:

Right. And the conversation with the editor would ideally get you to a place of greater clarity, not in just an arm wrestle. But if the writer can say, "Oh, I see what they're saying" that, that doesn't quite slow the train of thought from the beginning of the sentence to the end of the sentence, doesn't quite allow the reader to track. I can see what she's saying and if I just flip these few

extra words in there, then we're gonna keep everyone on board. And so that was probably the aspect of the editing process I found most useful. You know, the editor's saying, "I can't quite get what you're trying to say here. I'm sure of losing you." And then I would understand, "Oh ok" so...

Angela:

Exactly. So uhm, ok well...

Hope:

But you know, something that was super important to me is uhm, my book, immediately within four months of its release sold out its first 10,000 press. And so the book was being print-, and that like spun everyone's heads around at Tuttle. They had no idea it would hit that quickly and so they had to send the book back to Hongkong. They had to send the book back to Hongkong to have another 5,000 copies printed. It was off of the shelf for four or five months and the second printing of 5,000 did not sell out nearly as quickly. Uhm, so I think uhm, knowing that, I would highly recommend people work with printers, if possible, with printers in the U.S. to avoid that whole aspect of having to wait for this long shipment from the East. The other thing I learned to my detriment is, I did not have the subject of my book in the name title. *Healing Design* let bookstores put my book in Interior Design, in Health Food sections. The subtitle had the term *feng shui*. The main person at my publisher, publishing company, he realized, "Oh my heavens, we really dropped the ball here." If we would have had "Feng Shui" in the main title, then like maybe it could have been, "Healing Design with Feng Shui" or "Using Feng Shui." He said that he has no doubt the book would have sold between 1 and 200,000 copies. Now that is a mighty big slip-up on the publisher's part, but they didn't know. Feng shui was such a new subject, they just didn't know. And so, so people who are writing know their subject intimately better than anyone that they're gonna be dealing with. So I would suggest that they really tune in to the message that they're trying to portray and find a way to make it so crystal clear in the title that that's what's going on.

Angela:

Yeah, and if in 1999, keywords mattered that much, it's about ten times that now with the way the Internet, the popularity of the Internet, the way search algorithms work, like there is nothing more important than getting the right keywords in your title. So that's ah, that's a hard lesson learned knowing what that difference could have been, although your book has still sold so well.

Hope:

Yeah.

Angela:

You have been promoting it for over ten years. Uhm, so I wanna take a few minutes to talk about what some of the most successful things that you have seen in promoting your book, what's worked the best. And maybe if you have thoughts on how things have changed, how do you promote your book differently now than maybe ten years ago? Uhm, but give us some information on book promotion.

Hope:

Right. Sure. Uhm, I do think that having reviews on Amazon helped it immensely. And I took every opportunity to give talks to local newspapers, going live, you know TV's always looking for stories to add into their morning newscast and I just would not turn one opportunity to speak, down. And I wrote a few articles for local journals and I think, uhm, I would have flyers and I would mention the book in my flyers. It was uhm, part of an architectural firm. Uhm, they said, you know, "If this is an aspect that you would be interested in including with your home design, we have a local expert and she has written this book." So anytime that my name was mentioned, the people mentioning my name loved adding "author of" and it sort of was a win-win. It would help the book but it would also make me look like more of an authority and I didn't know any more after I wrote the book than I did before but, you know, I knew the same amount but after the book, it just looked like I was much more of an authority and it opened a lot of doors for me. So that was great.

Angela:

Yeah, it's amazing what a difference it makes having a book and what you said, it's totally true. You don't have to, nothing really changes after the book comes out but the way you're perceived does.

Hope:

Yes.

Angela:

So what are some of your favorite uhm, what are your favorite, tell me your favorite stories of things that have happened to you because you are an author. Things that you, ah, that maybe wouldn't have happened if you didn't have a book.

Hope:

Well I think that probably one of the best things is that people who hire me now as a consultant, uhm they, it's almost like they feel proud that they are hiring someone who is an author. There is a certain level of expertise that a business or an individual, you know, they'll, when I go into a consultation I will bring a copy of my book and sign it, and leave it with the client. So I have gone back and people will have my book on a coffee table and just tell me, "Yes my friends came over and they saw your book and I said, 'Oh, she came and worked on my home.'" Uhm, so there's uhm, and one, another client, a commercial client, uhm, he asked me for 25 copies of my book because he wanted to give it to a number of his associates. And again, there was just a certain like that, that author's pride was kind of going, continuing to go out through my clients. And that was really surprising for me, uhm you know, it was palpable and very sweet. And I've had, uhm after writing a book, I've had people interested to know what I'm reading, uhm, again like that carries more weight all of a sudden, *Oh she's an author, what is she reading? We wanna know what she's reading.* And uhm...

Angela:

Yeah, so what is your advice to people? I know authors get asked all the time, like they, people say, *I wanna write a book, I've always wanted to write a book, oh you're so, you know, you're so lucky you have a book.* So what is the advice that you get asked most about being an author and what do you tell people?

Hope:

Well, I actually thought co-writing a book with a friend was going to help us stay more committed to the writing process. But I have found that it really has not. We both are busy working women and it's even harder to find time in our joint schedules to get together and work on the book that we're working on. In fact, we've put about three years into this book, getting together about once a month and we're maybe halfway through. And I feel if we could just go away for a couple of weekends, we could finish the lion's share of it. But it really is a solitary journey even if you're writing with another person, and most people are not. And I think my best advice ... to know what the peak of their workday is. Are they, you know, more alive in the evening? More alive in the morning? And then you just need to not give yourself too many days off even if it means sitting down for 15 minutes to focus on the next idea, the next page. And it was really surprising to me when I got all 11 chapters finished, I could tell I was about three weeks away from being finished with the book and I felt like I just had nothing left. I had put my heart and soul out for two and a half years and I had nothing left. And a friend called me, she had a question about something completely unrelated and she knew I was working on the book. So she asked me where I was in my process, and I said, "Ginny, I feel like I just need to give up. I just, I don't care if this book never comes out. I just can't do it, I'm wasted." And she said, "I'm coming over after work." And this friend came over two or three nights a week for three weeks.

Angela:

Aahh.

Hope:

And she didn't wanna hear anything out of my mouth. She just sat at the computer and she said...

Angela:

I love that.

Hope:

Talk, just talk to me about your book. Don't, we're not talking about anything but your book.

Angela:

There is something so powerful about having an accountability partner on top of you on your book journey. I love that lesson. Hope Karan Gerech...

Hope:

In, well in addition to, in addition to an accounta-...

Angela:

We're just, we're right at the end of the hour.

Hope:

Ah.

Angela:

So Hope Karan Gerecht is the author of *Healing Design: Practical Feng Shui for Healthy and Gracious Living*. You can find out more about her at www.fengshuiinteriordesign.com. Hope, thank you so much for being our guest today.

Hope:

You're so welcome. Thank you as well.

Angela:

And we'll be back next week on Book Journeys Radio. Changing the world one book at a time.