

# Ancient art goes to the 2010 V

## Speed-skating oval in Richmond will incorporate feng shui principles

BY CATHRYN ATKINSON, RICHMOND

In a respectful nod to its large and influential Chinese-Canadian community, the City of Richmond is incorporating feng shui into the 2010 Winter Olympics by having a master of the ancient art assess plans for its speed-skating oval.

Sherman Tai, a 53-year-old feng shui consultant, was brought in by the city and Cannon Design, the architects responsible for the winning look for the \$178-million oval. Work began on the site last fall.

"It is an honour," said Mr. Tai, who lives in Richmond. "The oval is at the heart of a great development."

The oval is the second major municipal project for which Mr. Tai has acted as feng shui master. Richmond's city hall, which opened in 2000, is an award-winning design that incorporated rounded corners, painted handrails and concrete tinted with earth tones into the final structure on his advice.

Feng shui translates as "wind-water." The five core elements are metal, wood, water, fire and earth. There is a generative cycle of these elements that leads to harmony, success and happiness, Mr. Tai said. As well, he said, there is a destructive cycle that causes bad events and calamities. His work at the oval is to promote the former and minimize the latter.

Ted Townsend, spokesman for the city, said Mr. Tai had reviewed all the designs for the oval, visited the site and made recommendations "on alignments and on its location on the river based on the five main elements."

Overall, he said, Mr. Tai was "pleased" with the oval's design and did not feel much needed changing. Its riverside location pointed to a possible excess of the "water" element, Mr. Townsend said, which will be balanced by the inclusion of "major stone elements" in the plaza, which will represent "earth."

Marion LaRue, Cannon Design's project manager for the oval, said it was the first time the company has consulted a feng shui master and found Mr. Tai's input "very positive."

"We were requested by Rich-



Feng shui consultant Sherman Tai examines his compass at Richmond city hall. He has been retain-

mond council to have him on the project, and it was very useful. We had done some research on feng shui ourselves and he corroborated some of our design moves," she added.

Mr. Tai, a Hong Kong native who began studying feng shui at the age of 14, was a mechanical engineer for many years, working for the Hong Kong Electric Group and practising feng shui on a freelance basis. When he moved to Vancouver in 1989, he found the Chinese expatriate community eager for his services and a wider non-Chinese community beginning to embrace the practice.

Mr. Tai said he has never had to advertise for clients for feng shui assessments. He has performed such duties at River Rock Casino, also in Richmond; the HSBC bank's branch in Vancouver's Chinatown; and the Hong Kong offices of financial groups Morgan Stanley and Baring's.

In an interview, Mr. Tai said he charges around \$1,000 for a typical private consultation, which may take a year to complete. However, he declined to say what he is charging for the Olympic oval assessment.

Mr. Townsend said he was unable to comment on the cost of Mr. Tai's

services because his income continues and the final amount has not been calculated. "I'm not comfortable quoting a rate," Townsend said, "but it will be some point once the work is completed."

He added that budgeted costs for the oval are on track, in part because the Richmond site was a latecomer to the 2010 plan: The speed-skating oval came to the city in 2004 in response to Burnaby's Simon Fraser University.

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# to the 2010 Winter Olympics



LYLE STAFFORD/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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services because his involvement continues and the final costs have not been calculated. "I'm not comfortable quoting a rate," Mr. Townsend said, "but it will be public at some point once the work has been completed."

He added that budgeted costs for the oval are on track, in part because the Richmond site was a relative latecomer to the 2010 Olympics plan: The speed-skating venue came to the city in 2004 at the expense of Burnaby's Simon Fraser University.

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## Feng shui at a glance

**What it is:** Feng shui is the Chinese art of positioning objects in buildings and other places based on the belief in positive and negative effects of the patterns of yin and yang and the flow of *chi* (life energy).

All areas, large and small, are believed to have a distinctive energy that can be guided by rearranging, adding or removing objects to ensure maximum positive flow.

**How it works:** Feng shui practitioners believe the universe is composed of five core elements — metal, wood, water, fire and earth. A feng shui assessment aims to ensure a positive balance of these elements through the positioning of the buildings themselves, the placement of items inside and outside a building, and the construction materials used.

*Cathryn Atkinson*