Feng Shui in Architecture:

Cultural Symbolism or Genuine Impact?

Abstract

The relationship between architecture and human perception is a complex interplay of cultural, psychological and spatial aspects. Feng Shui is a traditional Chinese interior design concept that aims to promote well-being and harmony by aligning buildings with the flow of energy (Qi). While previous studies have explored Feng Shui as a cultural or psychological phenomenon, there is limited research comparing its perceived spatial effects directly with buildings designed according to Western architectural standards. This thesis addresses this gap by investigating whether the spatial experiences attributed to Feng Shui can be reproduced through universal design principles or whether they represent a culturally specific design logic. The following results will contribute to further dialogue on architectural psychology and the significance of traditional spatial concepts in modern design.

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Written by
Clara Soltész

Tutor
Vincent Baptist

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Introduction

Architecture is not only a physical structure but also influences the perception and well-being of its users. In doing so, they develop psychological and cultural associ-ations. Feng Shui is characterised as a system with numerous concepts that aims to harmonise buildings with their surroundings and occupants by observing certain spatial principles. Feng Shui originated in ancient Chinese cosmology and has influenced the design of houses, cities and landscapes for centuries. However, the actual effect of these principles is controversial.

While some architects and practitioners advocate Feng Shui to improve spatial harmony and human well-being (Lip, 1997), others argue that its effects can be explained by basic design principles and psychological expectations (Mak & Ng, 2005). This paper investigates whether the principles of Feng Shui impact spatial perception and user experience or whether the perceived benefits are merely the result of a culturally influenced placebo effect.

The study is based on the following research question: *How does applying Feng Shui principles influence the design and perception of space in residential buildings compared to buildings designed according to functional Western standards?* Although subjective perception and well-being are central objectives in both traditions, this work does not use a psychometric evaluation. Instead, it uses spatial proxies such as

light, flow, materiality and zoning as indirect indicators of perceived quality. This approach enables a well-founded comparison of spatial principles without relying on unverifiable empirical values. Building on this approach, this thesis examines whether Feng Shui offers clear architectural advantages or merely represents a culturally influenced interpretation of generally applied spatial strategies. This is done through a comparative analysis of two residential buildings designed according to Feng Shui principles and two examples based on Western functionalist frameworks such as Neufert's architectural guidelines.

Methodology and case studies

This thesis investigates whether the spatial and perceptual effects attributed to Feng Shui stem from a culturally unique design logic or can be explained through general architectural principles and psychological tendencies. To explore this, a comparative case study is applied, examining two buildings designed according to Western functionalist standards and two based on Feng Shui principles. While Feng Shui and functionalist approaches have been studied independently, this research offers a systematic, matrix-based spatial comparison between both traditions using original, culturally distinct case studies.

Selection and Justification of the Case Study

Case studies are chosen based on their representativeness within their respective design traditions, clarity of architectural intent, and accessibility of scholarly analysis and spatial documentation. Each example represented a distinct facet of spatial perception, hierarchy, and environmental integration, enabling a systematic comparison beyond aesthetics.

Feng Shui Buildings:

Yin Yu Tang (originally in Huizhou, China, now in Salem, USA): The Peabody Essex Museum reconstructed a complete traditional Qing dynasty merchant home. The axial organisation, space hierarchy, symbolic ornamentation, and incorporation of natural elements like light, water, and air through a "skywell" courtyard are all examples of traditional Feng Shui principles. Its cultural and historical authenticity provides a foundation for understanding traditional Chinese domestic space.

The *Nature House*, a modern residential structure purposefully created by Feng Shui principles, with a particular emphasis on water, spatial zoning, and natural materiality, was created by *Junsekino Architect and Design* in Bangkok, Thailand. It illustrates how conventional ideas can be incorporated into contemporary, contextually aware architecture.

Non – Feng Shui Buildings:

Ernst Neufert designed the *Neufert House*, a functionalist prototype built on a 10x10 m grid to maximise efficiency through standardisation, in Weimar, Germany. The house is a practical spatial manual that embodies his *Bauentwurfslehre's* tenets and provides insight into Western circulation methods, ergonomics, and spatial zoning without symbolic overlays.

Although not based on Feng Shui, *Fallingwater* (*Frank Lloyd Wright*, Pennsylvania, USA) shares spatial themes such as the use of water, fluid transitions, and integration with nature; however, these are explained through aesthetic and experiential reasoning rather than metaphysical logic.

Together, these structures allow for a cross-reading of form, flow, and meaning by spanning traditional and contemporary interpretations within their respective cultural contexts.

Development of Analytical Criteria

Based on The *Raumpilot*, Feng Shui principles (particularly the author Evelyn Lip), and environmental psychology, ten evaluation categories were first created to represent both quantifiable design elements and perceptual qualities:

Old Criteria	New Criteria
1. Spatial Flow & Movement	1. Spatial Flow & Movement
2. Light Usage & Natural Illumination	2. Light Usage & Natural Illumination
3. Material Selection & Environmental Integration	3. Material Selection & Environmental Integration
4. Subjective Perception & Well-being	-
5. Functional Efficiency & Ergonomics	4. Functional & Spatial Flexibility
6. Flexibility & Adaptability	- Merged with 5
7. Cultural Influence & Symbolism	5. Cultural Influence & Symbolism
8. Energy Flow & Qi Principles	- Merged with 1
9. Spatial Hierarchy & Zoning	6. Spatial Hierarchy & Zoning
10. Integration with Nature	7. Integration with Nature

Tab. 1 Old Criteria and New Criteria

This simplified framework preserves depth without confusing related concepts, enabling consistent comparison across culturally diverse projects. It makes it possible to read spatial strategies, whether they are based on intuitive design, symbolic reasoning, or empirical function, more nuancedly.

The fundamentals of Feng Shui in architectural practice must be discussed before proceeding to the individual case studies. Interpreting how these ideas appear in built

form and contrast with Western methods requires understanding its philosophical foundations and spatial logic.

Chapter 1: Feng Shui - origins, theory and design principles

1.1 The origins and theoretical foundations of Feng Shui

Feng Shui is based on several principles that aim to create a harmonious environment to improve its inhabitants' well-being and quality of life. As the paper by Fernandez-Beanato (2021) shows, some aspects of Feng Shui, particularly the effects of spatial organisation, light and materiality, create psychologically attractive settings. He states, "The availability of water, one of the most important principles of feng shui, is essential for human life. "(p.1343). Two main schools of Feng Shui are central to this: the Form School (the Book of Burial, Form School written by Guo Pu (276–324) focuses on five main theories: "Qi, Wind-water, Four Emblems, Form and Direction (He, 1990)" and with that it considers external environmental factors such as mountains, water and wind (Mak & Ng, 2005, p.60). The Compass School mainly uses the Luopan compass (Feng Shui compass) for practice, even though it investigates directional aspects through metaphysical cosmology. It examines the relationships between the five elements, eight trigrams, heavenly stems, earthly branches, and constellations (Mak & Ng, 2005, p.60). When evaluating a house, Feng Shui includes various aspects such as location, spatial arrangement and numerological features to determine the living space's quality and energetic balance (Yap & Lum, 2020).

In the book *Feng Shui: Teaching about Science and Pseudoscience*, it is stated that architects who are knowledgeable about Feng Shui and those who are not frequently come to similar conclusions regarding the suitability of building sites and floor plans. He references an empirical study conducted by Mak and Ng (2005), which discovered that architects in Sydney and Hong Kong typically created structures that adhered to conventional Feng Shui principles that had been in place for more than 2,000 years. This adds to the ongoing discussion about whether Feng Shui is a "black art" that enriches its practitioners monetarily or just "dressed-up" common sense (Eitel, as cited in Matthews, 2019, p.136).

Room organisation & Energy flow (Qi)

Rooms should be designed so that physical barriers or unfavourable placements do not interrupt the energy flow. This leads to favoured furniture placement and architectural elements that create an open and inviting atmosphere (Mak & Ng, 2005, p.64).

A well-known principle is, for example, when important furniture such as beds, desks or sofas are positioned to allow a clear view of doors but are not directly in front of them (Mak & Ng, 2005; Matthews, 2019).

It is also advisable to avoid lengthy and narrow corridors as they are seen as channels for uncontrolled energy flow (Yap & Lum, 2020). Soft, flowing transitions between spaces should instead be created to move within a building more intuitively and comfortably (Lip, 1997). These concepts are similar to the Western spatial organisations in the *Bauentwurfslehre* and the *Raumpilot*. They aim to increase user-friendliness and quality of stay.

Light, colour & psychological effect

In Feng Shui, natural light is fundamental for life energy (Qi). Large windows, strategically placed mirrors or open room concepts are used to maximise the flow of light (Yap & Lum, 2020). These principles are also reflected in Western design approaches, in which daylight is a decisive factor for well-being (Mak & Ng, 2005).

	Colour	Element	Cardinal Point	Season	Symbolism
yin	Green	Wood	East	Spring	Growth, Creativity
	White	Metal	West	Winter	Clarity, Retreat
	Black	Water	North	Cold	Depth, Intuition
yang	Red	Fire	South	Late summer	Energy, Joy
	Yellow	Earth	Centre	Autumn	Stability, Balance

Tab. 2 Parts of a table in Evelyn Lip's book p. 15

The choice of colours is based on the principles of Yin and Yang and the five elements that influence specific emotions and energy states. Lip (1997) describes this as follows: "All cool colours are *yin*, and all warm colours are *yang*." (p. 23, 26). The five elements stand for different things, as shown in *Tab. 2*.

Choice of materials & integration of natural elements

In Feng Shui architecture, materiality is of central importance. Feng Shui traditionally relies on natural materials seen as energetically stabilising (e.g. wood) (Charles et al., 2017; Lip, 1997).

The five elements are used for balance and stability. In practice, rooms often combine these elements to create specific atmospheres. For example, the introduction of water elements such as fountains or reflective surfaces can have a calming effect, while fire elements can generate activity and dynamism through warm colours or direct light sources (Lip, 1997).

1.3 Traditional vs. contemporary applications of Feng Shui

Over millennia, Feng Shui has evolved from ancient Chinese wisdom to a modern design approach. It has evolved into a broad paradigm linked to ecological and architectural design, with its roots in observations of astronomical, natural, and human phenomena. Modern architects acknowledge Feng Shui as an alternate framework for intricate design (Mak & Ng, 2005).

Traditional applications

Feng Shui has historically been used mainly in the design of palaces, temples and urban planning. In China, the Forbidden City in Beijing is a well-known example of architecture designed according to the principles of Feng Shui. Lip explains in her book (1997), "The design principles of traditional buildings were based on concepts of feng shui, such as symmetry, balance, hierarchy of height, wall enclosures and auspicious orientation." (p. 12).

Modern interpretation & adaptation

In the paper Feng Shui: An Alternative Framework for Complexity in Design, Mak and Ng (2005) state the following: Feng Shui, which has its roots in Chinese philosophy, is comparable to the intricate and intuitive process of architectural design, where experience and intuition are crucial. Researchers now recognise its potential as an alternative design approach that aligns with ecological and spatial harmony. The scientific foundation of the Form School approach, which emphasises environmental and spatial analysis, is widely acknowledged. Feng Shui is becoming more and more recognised by modern architects as a comprehensive theory that improves the interaction between interior spaces and outdoor environments. Modern Feng Shui offers an alternative framework for spatial organisation, offering insights into building placement, orientation, and materiality to create harmonious and balanced environments rather than contradicting traditional design theories.

Criticism & scientific perspective

In its traditional application, Feng Shui is closely linked to cultural and spiritual beliefs. Therefore, the question arises as to whether its principles are also functional without these contexts. Opponents argue that many of its concepts are not empirically verifiable and are based on subjective perceptions rather than scientifically sound design approaches (Fernandez-Beanato, 2020).

At the same time, studies in environmental psychology show that some basic Feng Shui concepts, such as the relevance of light, colours, and spatial mobility, align with Western findings on spatial perception and well-being (Fernandez-Beanato, 2020). This suggests that in its modern interpretation, Feng Shui can be seen as a psychological design system that has significance beyond its cultural roots (Mak & Ng, 2005).

Another crucial approach in architectural theory is grounded in empirical research and standardisation rather than cultural belief. Although the scientific validity of Feng Shui is still up for debate, its impact on spatial perception raises the more general question of how design principles shape human experience.

Chapter 2: Neufert and the spatial pilot - origins and principles

2.1 Ernst Neufert's Bauentwurfslehre (translated as Theory of Building Design)

Ernst Neufert (1900-1986), a student of the Bauhaus, published the "*Bauentwurfslehre*" in 1936. This comprehensive work for engineers and architects defines dimensions, proportions and functional requirements for

rooms and buildings. It is based on the principles of ergonomics, efficiency and standardisation in the construction industry and has been translated into more than 22 languages (Neufert Foundation).

The *Bauentwurfslehre* has been updated by architects Johannes Kister, Patricia Merkel, Mathias Brockhaus, and Matthias Lohmann since the 38th edition in 2005. Six additional versions have been released over the years, methodically dividing the enormous amount of material into several sections that are updated regularly Neufert-Stiftung (translated: "Neufert-foundation," n.d.).

The tricky balance between incorporating new subjects and conceptual advancements and upholding Neufert's traditional approach is emphasised by Professor Johannes Kister in an interview published on the Website of *Neufert's foundation*. The revisions guarantee that *Bauentwurfslehre* will always be a valuable resource, adapting to new architectural problems.

2.2 The Raumpilot (best translated as 'Guide to Spatial Design')

The "*Raumpilot*," a modern alternative to building design theory, was developed by experts from various disciplines. It focuses on flexibility, sustainability and user-centredness. In contrast to Neufert, it does not contain fixed standards but customisable concepts for modern architecture (Deutsches Architektenblatt).

It has a modern and contemporary layout and is structured into four volumes: Grundlagen (Basics), Arbeiten (Working), Lernen (Learning), and Wohnen (Living). The *Raumpilot* is a foundational book published by the Wüstenrot Stiftung (Foundation) and has gained substantial traction in architectural offices and universities throughout Germany since its first edition in 2010.

The "*Wohnen*" volume provides a thorough framework supporting this thesis's analytical matrix. It presents important spatial concepts to analyse the spatial flow, light, room zoning, and adaptability of 101 completed housing projects. These are grounded in lived reality and assessed based on user needs, perception, and functionality rather than abstract norms. The Raumpilot builds a toolbox that connects theory and practice by structuring case studies according to factors like population size, spatial organisation, orientation, and transformation potential.

This floor plan example, the number [011](Fig. 1), is taken from the document "*Wohnen*". Beda Dillier's residential block in Sarnen is a modern take on Le Corbusier's "plan libre" concept and belongs to the Style, Theory category. The interior is arranged according to a clear spatial logic: one enters through an antechamber that is divided by a door and then proceeds into a puffer zone, where a small, undefined area to the left may be used as a storage room/ laundry room. The layout opens into a spacious, longitudinal area that illustrates open spatial flow, where the kitchen, dining, and living areas blend seamlessly. Before arriving at the private bedrooms, one must turn right and go through a buffer zone that houses the restrooms. This arrangement reveals a clear spatial hierarchy that directs the transition from public to private functions.

Fig. 1 Floorplan 011 from Raumpilot. Beda Dillier's residential block in Sarnen

Feature	Neufert	Raumpilot
Focus	Standardisation	Flexibility
Target group	Architects, engineers	Interdisciplinary planners
Methodology	Tables, dimensions, standards	Practical examples, theory
Relevance today	Classic standard work, DIN-norms	Adaptable to modern needs

Tab. 3 Comparison of Neufert and Raumpilot

Furthermore, the structure only needs two load-bearing columns, which permits flexible interior space utilisation. The large window openings on the south side create a strong visual connection with the surrounding landscape, improving daylighting. Important architectural features like functional clarity, adaptable layout, a focus on natural lighting, and integrating the built form with its surroundings are already evident in this project. These elements show more than just a theoretical framework. These aspects reflect a theoretical design foundation and point toward a broader set of spatial principles that inform contemporary housing design.

Chapter 3: Development of a comparative matrix

3.1. Systematic comparison of Feng Shui to Western standards

Although both Feng Shui and Western architectural standards seek to create harmonious and functional spaces, their design approaches differ. Based on the Daoist philosophy, Feng Shui balances concepts like Yin-Yang, the Five Elements, and spatial orientation by optimising Qi flow. On the other hand, efficiency, ergonomics, and adaptability are given priority in Western standards, such as Neufert's Bauentwurfslehre and the Raumpilot.

Notwithstanding these disparate starting points, there are some commonalities between the two approaches, especially concerning material choice, the use of natural light, and intuitive circulation. This begs the question: Does Feng Shui adhere to universal architectural principles, or does it introduce distinctive spatial strategies?

The following analysis looks at whether the effects of Feng Shui result from unique design mechanisms or are a cultural interpretation of long-standing architectural practices.

Space Organisation

Feng Shui determines how areas should be arranged according to the energy flow, frequently adding features like water to improve the balance. Nonetheless, universal architectural concepts that emphasise circulation and usability, like Neufert's functional guidelines, can be used to explain comparable spatial arrangements.

Light Balance

A fundamental component of Feng Shui is preserving a harmonious interplay between light and shadow to create a balanced atmosphere. However, contemporary architecture also places a high priority on optimising natural daylight while considering user comfort, sustainability, and energy efficiency. This suggests that light balance is a commonly accepted architectural technique rather than being exclusive to Feng Shui.

Material Selection

Feng shui encourages using natural materials like stone and wood to improve the flow of positive energy (Qi). However, modern architecture also prioritises sustainability and environmental integration, choosing materials not because of their metaphysical qualities but because of their ecological impact, durability, and thermal qualities.

Preliminary Conclusion

Feng Shui's fundamental ideas mainly coincide with accepted best practices in architecture, indicating that its effects might be more culturally or psychologically influenced than structurally distinct. Although Feng Shui provides a symbolic and comprehensive framework, its material, lighting, and spatial strategies closely resemble universal design paradigms, suggesting that it may operate more as a cultural interpretation of basic architectural principles than a stand-alone system.

3.2. Creating the matrix criteria

Table 4 presents a structured comparison between Feng Shui and Western architectural standards, referencing *Bauentwurfslehre* by Neufert and the *Raumpilot*.

The *Table 5* shows the essential principles, which emphasise balance, energy flow, and environmental harmony. These principles are influenced by crucial writers like Evelyn Lip, who study Feng Shui in architectural contexts. The other criteria stem from analysing the *Raumpilot* outside of this thesis and what mostly stood out as common in the floorplans.

Ten evaluation criteria were included in the original matrix to compare case studies of Western and Feng Shui-inspired architecture. During the analytical testing stage, several redundancies were discovered. For example, Functional Efficiency and Flexibility addressed related

Category	Comparison: Feng Shui Vs. Western Architecture			
	Feng Shui Architecture	**Western Architectural Standards**	**Similarities**	**Contrast**
Layout & Space Organization	Flowing, harmonious transitions; avoidance of dead ends	Efficient space planning, clear functional zones	Both aim for clear spatial organisation	Feng Shui (F.S.) emphasises energy flow, Western architecture (W.A.) focuses on efficiency
Entrance & Doors	Entrance is the mouth of the house, should not be directly aligned with a door or window	Representative entrances, often centrally placed or functionally aligned	Entrances as central design elements	F.S. prioritises Qi flow, W.A. prioritises function
Lighting & Illumination	Yin-Yang balance, no overly bright or dark spaces, natural daylight preferred	Standard-compliant lighting, task lighting vs. mood lighting	Lighting as a functional and mood-setting element	F.S. prefers soft, natural light, W.A. follows standardised lighting norms
Materiality & Surfaces	Natural materials like wood, stone; no sharp edges	Durable materials, easy-to-maintain surfaces	Material selection influences spatial quality	F.S. favours natural materials, W.A. often uses industrial materials
Colours & Symbolism	Red for energy, blue for calmness, yellow for prosperity; symbolic decorative elements	Colours based on function (e.g., blue for bedrooms, white for kitchens)	Colours have a psychological effect	F.S. assigns symbolic values to colours; W.A. uses functional colour schemes
Indoor Climate & Air Quality	Good air circulation, plants to enrich Qi	Technical ventilation systems, humidity control according to standards	Indoor climate is crucial for well-being	F.S. emphasises natural ventilation, W.A. relies on technical systems
Furniture & Arrangement	Furniture should not be placed directly under beams; round tables for community	Ergonomic layout, furniture arranged based on room size	Furniture should provide comfort and functionality	F.S. prefers rounded forms, W.A. favours right angles
Acoustics & Sound	Avoidance of echo and hard floors, use of textiles for sound absorption	DIN standards for sound insulation, impact noise reduction	Acoustics affect spatial comfort	F.S. uses textiles for acoustics, W.A. implements soundproofing measures
Room Shape & Proportions	Balanced proportions, no irregular shapes	Harmony through the golden ratio or fixed height/width ratios	Good proportions are essential for aesthetics	F.S. avoids irregular shapes, W.A. sometimes intentionally uses them
Garden & Outdoor Space	Garden with protected areas, water elements for energy flow	Garden as an additional space, often functionally planned	Outdoor space contributes to overall living quality	F.S. focuses on energetic benefits, W.A. on practical use
Technical Systems	Minimal electromagnetic pollution, good placement of devices to optimize Qi	Electrical planning based on safety standards, ergonomic usability	Technical systems should provide comfort and safety	F.S. minimizes electromagnetic pollution, W.A. optimizes technology for efficiency

Tab. 4 Comparison Feng Shui vs. Western Architecture

aspects of spatial usability, while Spatial Flow overlapped with Energy Flow and Qi Principles. Furthermore, because there was insufficient user-based data, Subjective Perception and well-being were eliminated.

This led to the matrix's simplification into seven key areas, as shown in *Table 5*. This elegant framework guarantees a precise, targeted comparison of architectural approaches without compromising complexity or cultural subtleties. It is based on observable and researchable qualities and reflects design intent and spatial experience.

Main Criteria	Sub-Questions for Evaluation
1. Spatial Flow & Movement	Are movement paths intuitive and logical? Does the design promote smooth transitions between spaces? Does the layout guide users naturally?
2. Light Usage & Natural Illumination	How well does the design optimise daylight penetration? Are artificial lighting strategies integrated harmoniously? Is there a balance between light and shadow?
3. Material Selection & Environmental Integration	Are materials chosen for their sustainability, durability, and aesthetic appeal or good qi purposes? Do they reflect cultural identity? How well does the building interact with its natural surroundings?
4. Functional & Spatial Flexibility	Does the space support its intended function efficiently? Are layouts ergonomic and adaptable to future use or transformation?
5. Cultural Influence & Symbolism	Is the design rooted in cultural traditions? Does it incorporate philosophical or symbolic elements (e.g., Feng Shui principles, historical references)?
6. Spatial Hierarchy & Zoning	Are public, semi-public, and private areas clearly defined? Does zoning support both functionality and comfort?
7. Integration with Nature	Does the design create a seamless indoor-outdoor connection? Are views, vegetation, and water features incorporated to enhance experience?

Tab. 5 Sub-Questions for Evaluation

Chapter 4: Analysis of case studies based on the matrix

4.1. Feng Shui Buildings:

4.1.1. Yin Yu Tang (Salem, USA, formerly in Huizhou area, southeast China) – Traditional Chinese House

Cultural Context and Architectural Background

This analysis is based exclusively on the online exhibit "Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home" from the Peabody Essex Museum. Yin Yu Tang, or "Hall of Plentiful Shelter," was a 16-room timber-frame home built by the Huang family, a merchant family, in the Huizhou area of southeast China during the Qing Dynasty. The house, which had been occupied by eight generations until the early 1980s, was dismantled in the 1990s, moved to Massachusetts, and then put back together at the museum before it was opened to the public in 2003. According to local Feng Shui beliefs, its north-facing orientation toward a village stream and the nearby hills represents an auspicious placement. The building's "skywell", or stone-paved courtyard, serves as its focal point and offers air, light, and symbolic unity.

Spatial Reading of the House

The forecourt (Fig. 12), which was formerly used for cooking and household chores, is where the spatial sequence starts. From there, it passes a deflecting wall and enters the light-filled central courtyard (Fig. 2+4) where women congregate for everyday activities. The court-

Fig. 2 Yin Yu Tang: Courtyard Photo by Bob Packert/PEM

Fig. 3 Yin Yu Tang: Reception Hall. Photo by Bob Packert/PEM

Fig. 4 The skywell and entry hall view of one pool in Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home. Photo by Dennis Helmar

Fig. 5 Yin Yu Tang 1926 marriage room in Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home. Photo by Dennis Helmar

yard was surrounded by pools (Fig. 4) that were useful and aesthetically pleasing. The Reception Hall (Fig. 3) for ceremonies and ancestor worship is located at the north end, encircled by private rooms with a rigid hierarchy. Personal areas like the Merchant's and Grandmother's Bedrooms (Fig. 7) are marked with symbolic décor, like Chairman Mao's poster or the "Double Happiness" character. The upper rooms are used for guests, weddings, and religious activities, while a wooden gallery (Fig. 11) above controls the air and light. Ideals of harmony and peace are reflected in the carved lattice windows (Fig. 10) throughout.

Architectural Evaluation Based on Matrix Criteria (Tab. 5, Fig. 8+9)

Although it lacks flexibility, spatial flow is strongly axial. The upper gallery(Fig. 11) and courtyard (Fig. 4) allow effortless movement, but the kitchen path is constrained. Many rooms, particularly on the ground floor, are still dark and distinctly *yin* in character, even though light is concentrated in the courtyard and modulated upstairs by wooden panels. Materials follow the logic of the environment: wood adds warmth to private areas, while stone is used in places that are likely to get wet and see much traffic. Although there is limited flexibility, the layout promotes functional clarity.

Access, décor, and room orientation are all influenced by social hierarchy. Every layer contains cultural symbolism, from carved motifs to political posters. Although the building uses air and water to interact with nature, it lacks vegetation and external views, which restricts dynamic energy exchange.

Fig. 6 Yin Yu Tang: Kitchen Photo by Bob Packert/PEM

Fig. 7 Yin Yu Tang: Grandmother's room. Photo by Bob Packert/PEM

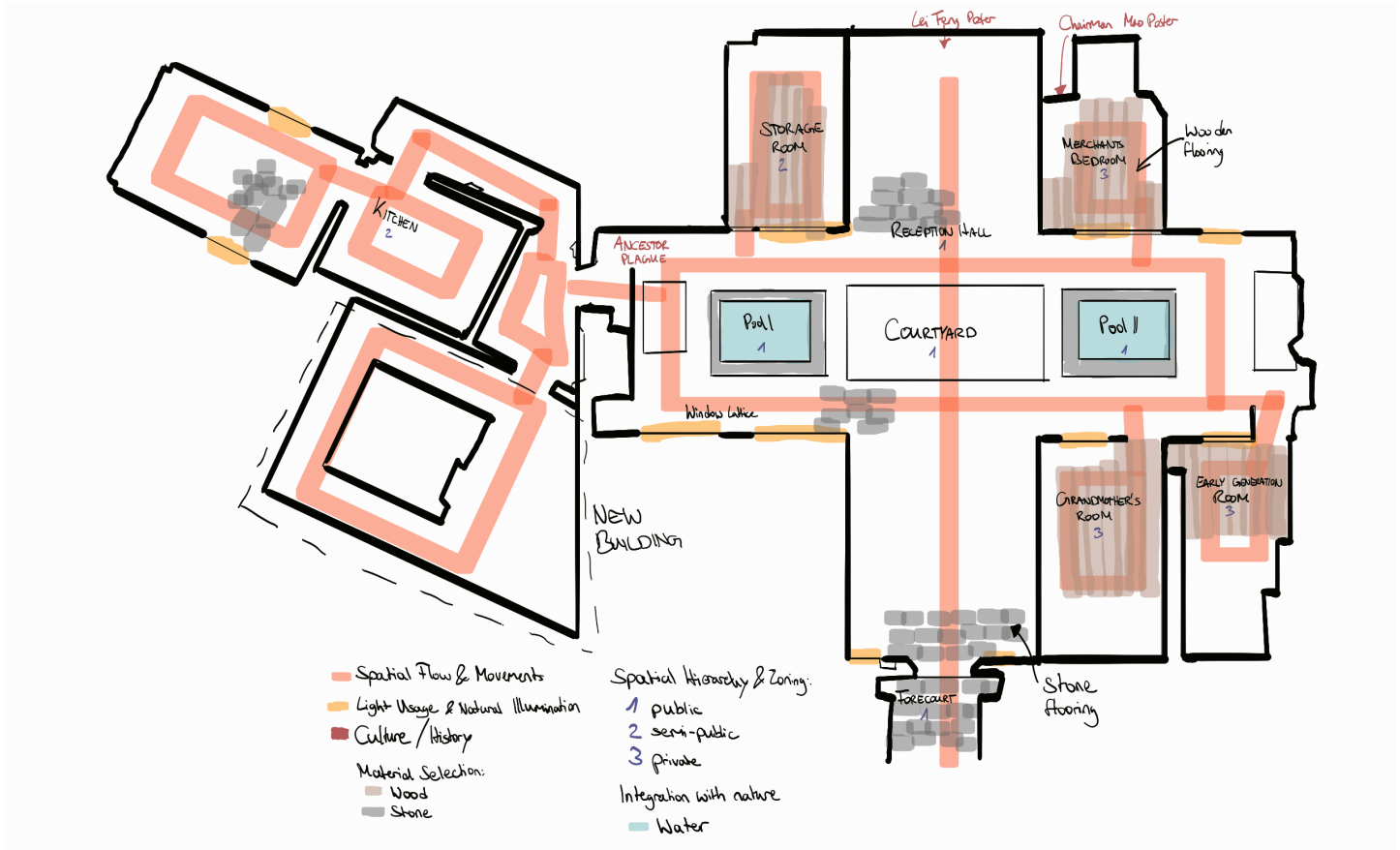

Fig. 8 First Floor Analysis Yin Yu Tang

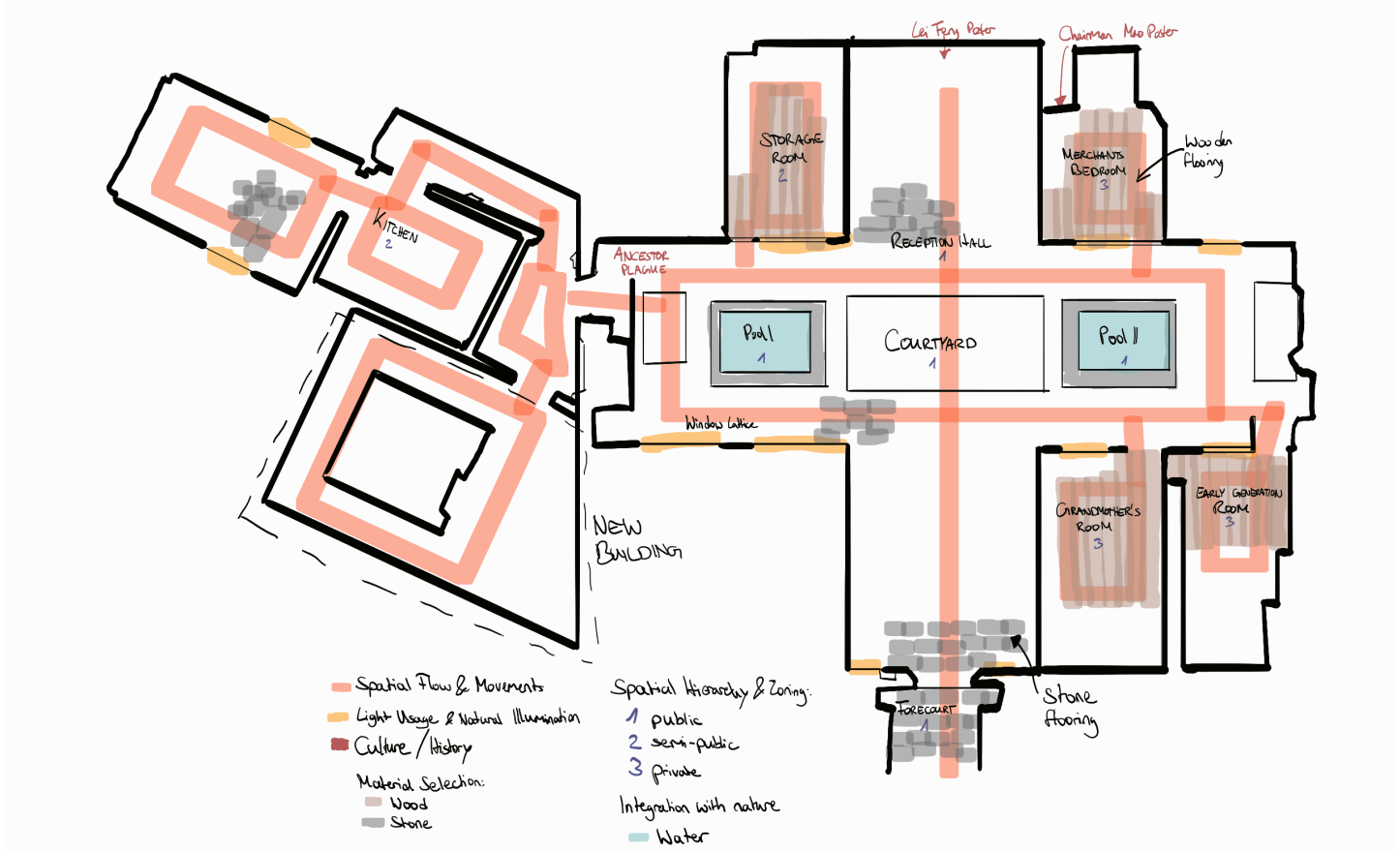

Fig. 9 Second Floor Analysis Yin Yu Tang

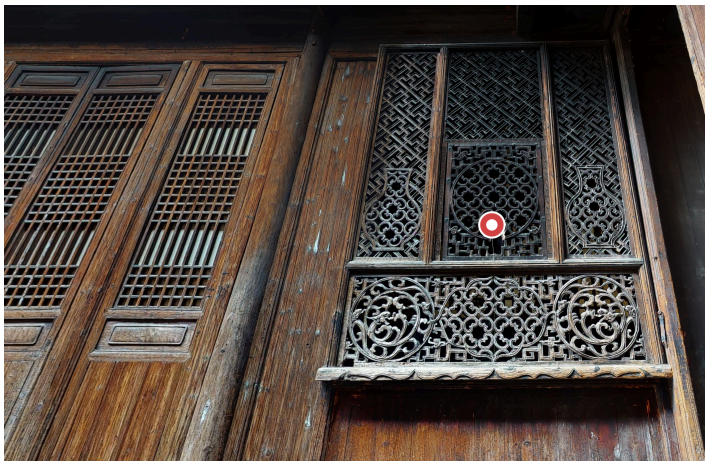

Fig. 10 Window Lattice. Screenshot of the 3D Tour on PEM's website

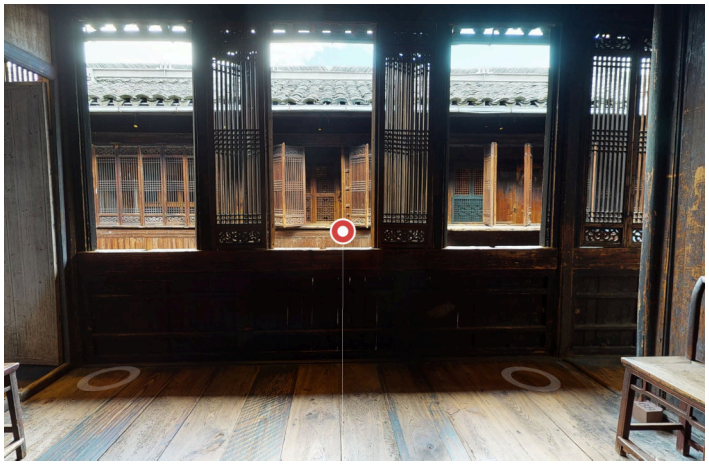

Fig. 11 Upstairs Reception Hall. Screenshot of the 3D Tour on PEM's website

Fig. 12 Entrance: Screenshot from the 3D Tour on PEM's website

Comparative Reflections Based on Evelyn Lip's Principles

There are some similarities and possible criticisms when this house is compared to Evelyn Lip's Feng Shui principles. The small redirection wall after the entrance matches Lip's advice to prevent direct energy from entering too forcefully (cf. Fig. 61, p.37). However, qi may flow through the house too quickly due to the strong central axis that runs straight from the entrance to the Reception Hall; Lip might suggest a screen or visual break along this line (Fig. 54, p.35). Despite their symbolic and utilitarian value, the courtyard pools are motionless and may encourage stagnation instead of movement.

To strengthen the familial structure, Lip frequently advocates for more significant differentiation in room sizes and proportions, even though the social hierarchy of rooms is visible (cf. Fig. 57, p.36). Lip's focus on the influence of meaningful iconography on spatial energy aligns well with the symbolic dimension of the house, especially in areas like the shrine room, the lattice carvings, and politically charged posters (cf. Fig. 67, p.39).

4.1.2. Nature House (Junsekino Architect, Bangkok, Thailand) (Fig. 16)

The *Nature House* is a 400 m² residence in Bangkok, completed in 2010 by *Junsekino Architect and Design*. It was intentionally planned according to Feng Shui principles, with water as the primary balancing element for qi. The design divides the house into two main zones, public and private, connected by a bridge over a water feature. This creates a two-axis spatial layout that ensures intuitive movement while maintaining privacy, reflecting strong spatial flow and movement.

Large openings and a central courtyard (Fig. 15) allow daylight to enter generously, promoting natural light usage and ventilation. At night, soft artificial lighting sup-

ports a harmonious transition, maintaining the balance between light and shadow. The choice of materials, primarily wood, stone (Fig. 14), and natural finishes, improves environmental integration and sustainability while fortifying the physical and emotional bond with nature. Although using concrete and fixed walls in other areas somewhat restricts future spatial adaptability, the open-plan design of the kitchen, dining, and living areas (Fig. 13) promotes flexible usage. Still, the design supports daily function efficiently, with a clear spatial hierarchy: public zones at the front, semi-private areas on the left next to the public space, and private bedrooms across the bridge in a quieter zone (Fig. 15+16).

The integration with nature is strong trees growing within and around the water features (Fig. 15), and natural materials like wooden flooring extend from indoor to outdoor zones, creating a seamless indoor-outdoor connection (Fig. 15). While the design avoids overt cultural symbolism, it subtly reflects Thai architectural openness and landscape engagement traditions.

Feng Shui Comparison Based on Evelyn Lip's Principles

The buffered entrance, water as a balancing element, and soft transition between zones prevent "excessively vibrant qi" (cf. Fig. 54, 61, p. 35,37). The open, light-filled central space and bridge over water reflect Lip's emphasis on expanded living rooms and qi circulation (cf. Fig. 56, p. 36). While less focused on symbolic motifs or historical forms (cf. Fig. 67, p.39), the house excels in spatial clarity, balance, and elemental harmony, demonstrating how modern design can meet traditional spatial goals through different cultural expressions.

Fig. 13 Inside Nature House Photo by ArchDaily

Fig. 14 Nature House Bedroom from the outside Photo by ArchDaily

Fig. 15 Nature House terrace photo by ArchDaily

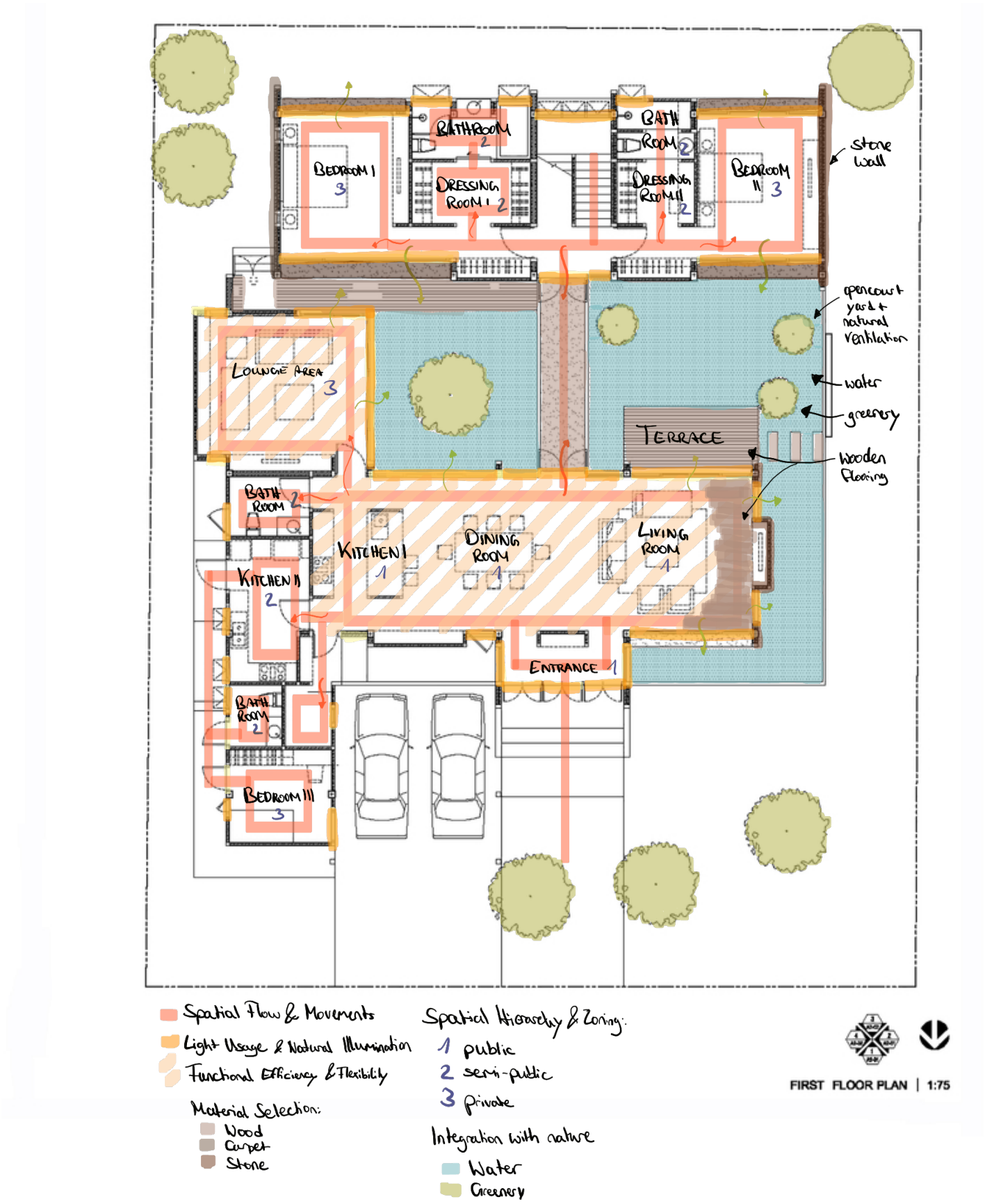

Fig. 16 First Floor Nature House

Concluding Reflection on Feng Shui in Traditional and Contemporary Housing

Yin Yu Tang and the *Nature House* exemplify how Feng Shui principles can be incorporated into traditional or modern architectural design. Both residences prioritise the flow of qi through harmonious spatial layouts, hierarchies, and organic integration, even though they vary in scale, cultural context, and architectural language. Elements like water, axial organisation, zoning, and material selection are used with care to encourage harmony, clarity, and well-being.

However, what is most compelling is how both designs reflect spatial instincts that are recognisable even outside of Feng Shui's metaphysical framework. Concepts such as privacy gradation, daylight management, and circulation logic echo what Western architecture might define through ergonomics, environmental comfort, and functional zoning. While Feng Shui relies on symbolic and energetic reasoning, its spatial outcomes often resemble modern architectural science.

To better understand how these spatial logics differ in reasoning but not always in result, the following section examines Western architectural standards, beginning with Ernst Neufert's house, as a contrasting example grounded in functionality and standardisation.

Fig. 17 Outside Neufert House Photo by Neufert Foundation

Fig. 18 Study Room Neufert House, Photo by Neufert Foundation

4.2. Western Standards (Neufert/ Raumpilot):

4.2.1. The Neufert house (Ernst Neufert, Weimar, Germany) (Fig. 20+21)

Ernst Neufert's 1929 plan for the *Neufert House* in Weimar is a prime example of a purely functional and efficient approach to home design. The house, which was built on a 10 x 10 m grid, was intended to serve as a home and an integrated architectural office.

The building was designed as an experimental timber structure, likely using American balloon-frame principles, according to the *Neufert Foundation*. The prefabricated structural frame was put together on-site in two days, and it featured a masonry base with a cellar, garage, and guest room. The entire house was finished in six weeks because every component was made ahead of time in the workshop to reduce manual labour. Inside the house, wood is used consistently for the flooring, continuing throughout all rooms in various patterns that reflect practicality and a restrained visual rhythm.

The overall idea offers effective spatial organisation and clear circulation, reflecting a highly structured design logic (Fig. 20). The zoning divides public, semi-private, and private areas to promote comfort and legibility, and

the paths through the house are clear and purposeful. This clear spatial hierarchy guarantees usability and functional clarity.

Light usage, however, remains a purely technical matter rather than a means of crafting atmosphere or symbolic equilibrium. This is made clear by the continuous row of windows (Fig. 17+18) positioned next to each other with the same height, size, and material. The *Neufert Foundation* claims that this design decision was made to visually connect the facade across spaces and prevent the facade from looking like a rigid cube. The effect is less sophisticated from the inside, though, as there is an abrupt edge created by the lack of a material or spatial transition between the wall and the window. As a result, the composition lacks visual coherence, giving the impression that the wall was not intended in the spatial organisation but rather added later.

Anthropometric accuracy serves as the foundation for the arrangement. Room dimensions and furniture placement were determined by standard human measure-

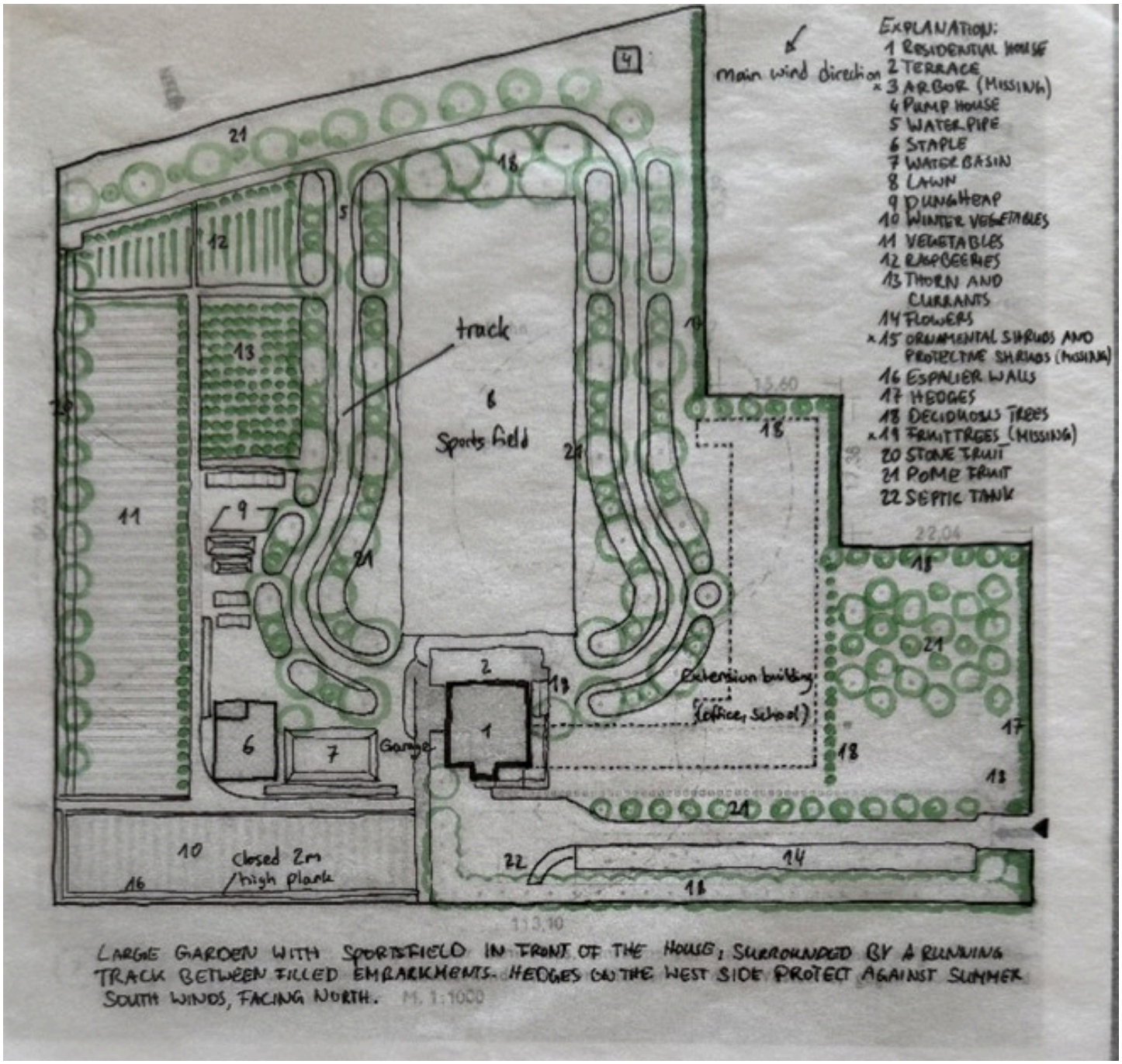

Fig. 19 Analysis: Garden of the Neufert House

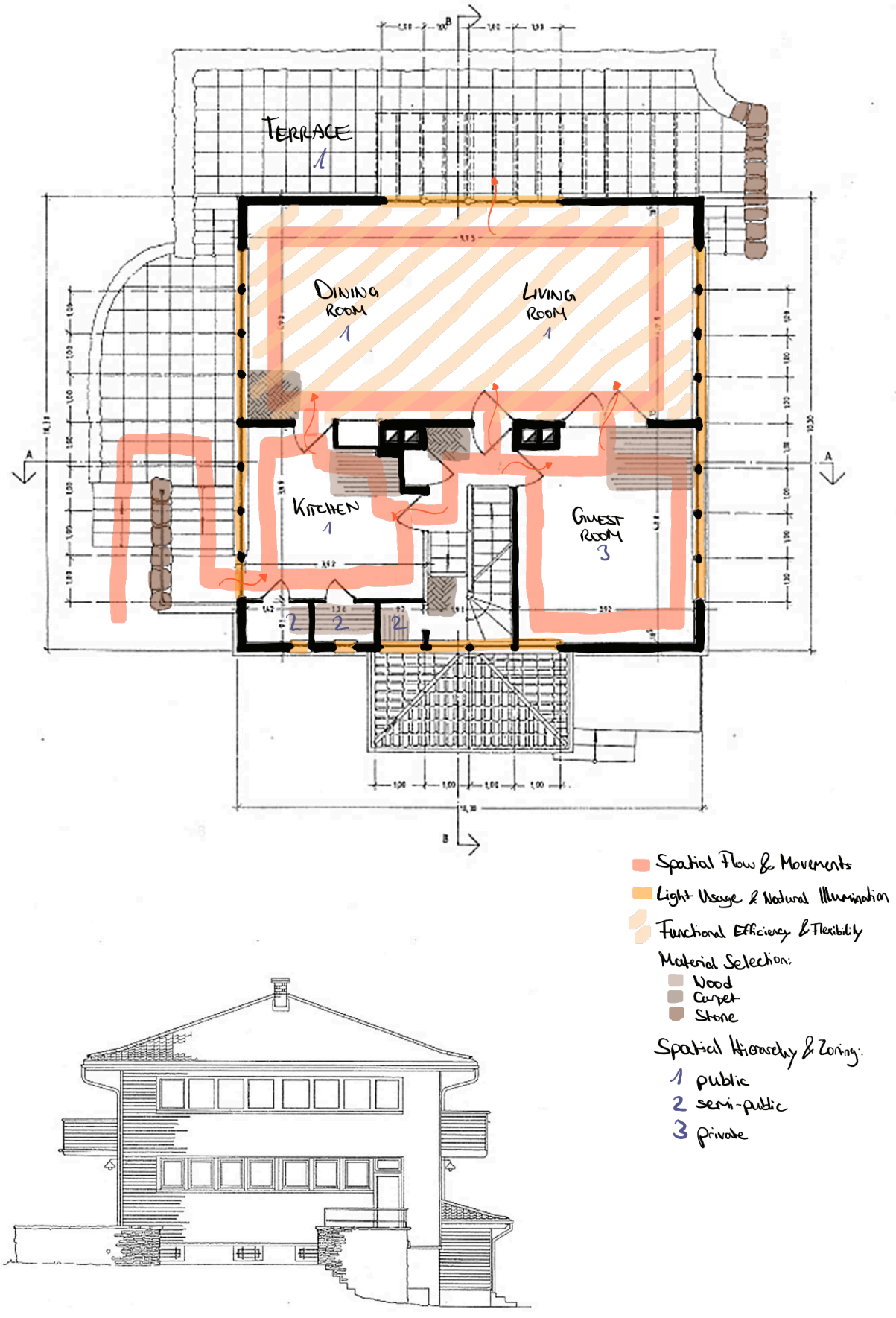

Fig. 20 First Floor and Elevation Analysis Neufert House

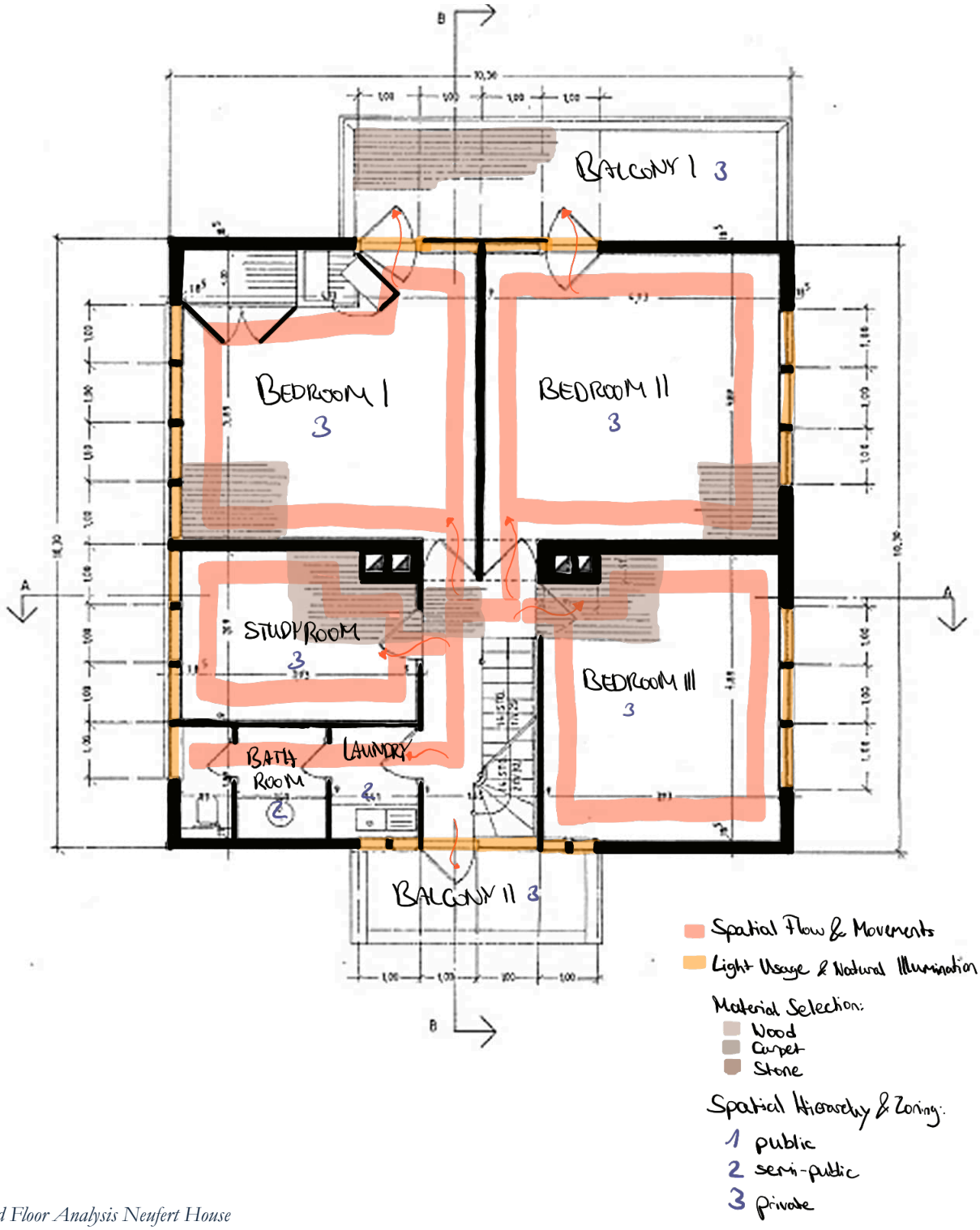

Fig. 21 Second Floor Analysis Neufert House

ments, resulting in accessible and ergonomic spaces. In everyday use, this leads to a feeling of clarity and ease. A modular planning system offers little flexibility because, although certain room functions may change over time, the structural zoning stays the same and prioritises long-term effectiveness over change.

The design focuses solely on standardisation and function, purposefully excluding cultural or symbolic allusions. Tradition, ornament, and philosophical ideas are irrelevant. Additionally, nature is viewed logically; its significance is recognised in ventilation and daylighting techniques rather than as a story or emotional connection source. However, the house was part of a large garden (Fig. 19) that featured flowerbeds, vegetable plots, orchards, a stable, water basins, composting areas, a drainage pit, terraces, a ring water system for automated irrigation, and even a running track, as the

Neufert Foundation points out (Fig. 16). These exterior elements communicate a broader ecological and self-sufficient mindset, even though they were not considered in the interior architectural experience.

Overall, the Neufert House attains a high level of spatial discipline and practical coherence. It may be devoid of emotional nuance, cultural resonance, or symbolic meaning, but it is excellent in logic, usability, and structural clarity. It provides an example of early modernist standardisation within its goal-driven framework, with rational planning acting as the primary design language.

4.2.2 Fallingwater (Frank-Lloyd Wright, Mill Run, USA) (Fig. 23+24)

Fallingwater is renowned for its exceptional spatial fluidity, which is made possible by cantilevered platforms that extend far into the surrounding environment and provide intuitive movement guidance. The daylight penetration of large glass openings and open terraces produces a bright and inviting interior atmosphere. There is a strong sense of harmony with the site because the material palette, wood and stone, echoes the nearby rock

Fig. 22 Fallingwater from the Outside by ArchDaily

formations. The immersive experience, the sound and presence of water, and the ongoing connection to nature create a calm and contemplative atmosphere.

However, the spatial design occasionally compromises functional efficiency even though it excels at producing emotional and sensory richness. Due to the predominant emphasis on sculptural expression and aesthetic co-

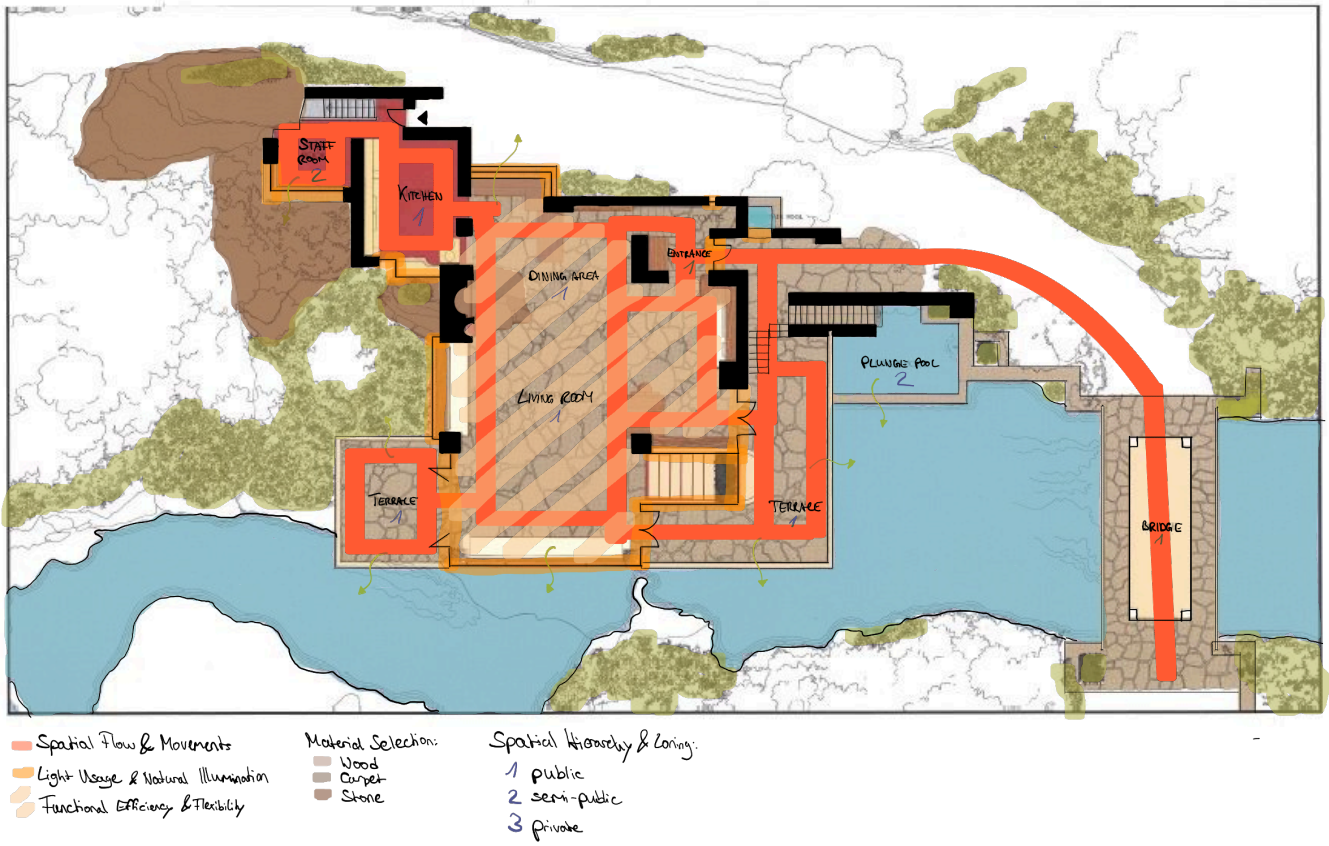

Fig. 23 First Floor Analysis Fallingwater

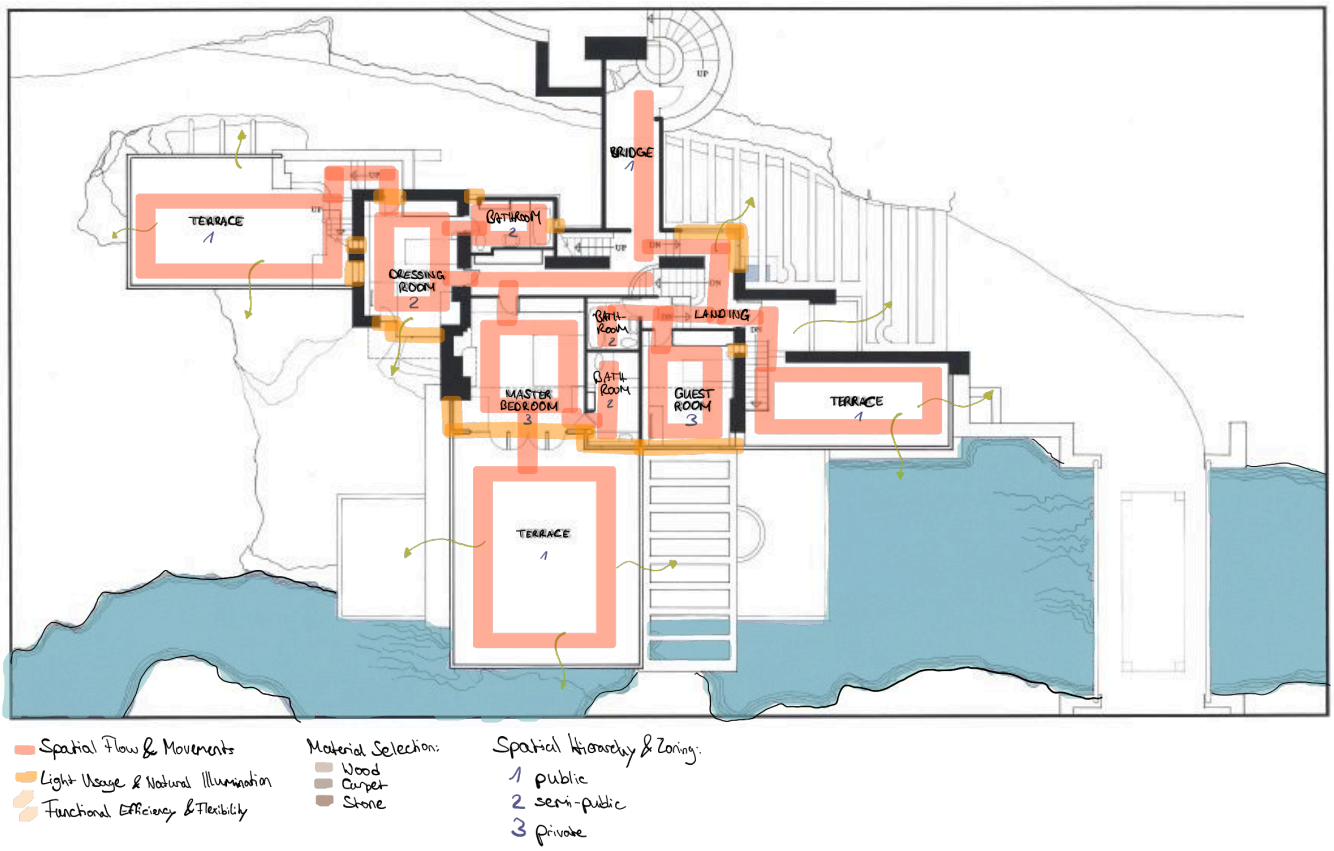

Fig. 23 Second Floor Analysis Fallingwater

herence, some areas (such as circulation pathways or storage spaces) are restricted or awkwardly proportioned. The fixed structural system makes spatial reconfiguration impossible, restricting further adaptability on the second floor.

Fallingwater's spatial organisation is characterised by a robust vertical hierarchy fostering social interaction and privacy (Fig. 22+23). The living room, kitchen, and dining area make up the majority of the ground floor, creating a spacious and inviting common area. Private bedrooms, bathrooms, dressing rooms, and guest rooms are all on the upper floor. They mostly open directly onto private terraces.

Although the first and second floors are the focus of this analysis, the house has other levels as well: a lower guest suite with a living area, entrance, and plunge pool access; staff quarters with three bedrooms and a shared bathroom; and a top floor with a study, a bed area, and a terrace. The building's internal spatial hierarchy and zoning logic are reinforced on each floor.

The relationship between *Fallingwater* and its natural surroundings is constant and immersive. Before entering the house, one must cross a bridge over the stream, creating a symbolic and physical connection with the surroundings. Inside, there is constant visual access to the water and forest thanks to strategically placed terraces and continuous glazing. The kitchen and staff areas have views of the river, and the living room opens completely to two spacious terraces. The bedrooms upstairs have private terraces and a direct view of the trees, adding to the feeling of embedded shelter. Parts of the native stone extend into the interior, anchoring the architecture to the rocky terrain. This is particularly noticeable in the kitchen, where the rock blends perfectly with the built environment and rises through the floor. Water plays a subtle role throughout, as evidenced by the stream that runs beneath the house, the small pool next to the lower terrace, and the secondary water feature that marks the entrance path. These components, along with the regular use of wood and stone, give nature an active and distinctive presence in the spatial experience.

Lastly, even though the design fosters a nearly spiritual bond with the surroundings, it makes no conscious use of symbolic or cultural systems like Feng Shui. There-

fore, the balance and "energy flow" are more the result of universal spatial harmony than of culturally encoded practices, which begs the question of whether its alleged benefits are purely architectural or merely appeal to psychological preconceptions of what natural integration ought to feel like.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

5.1. Interpretation of results from case studies.

Important trends appear when the four case studies are grouped according to their spatial orientation rather than cultural origin. The Nature House and Fallingwater both have an outward-facing spatial logic marked by strong indoor-outdoor connections, openness, and integration of nature. Water plays a defining role in both situations, whether flowing beneath the building or encircling public spaces, promoting fluid movement and visual continuity. Both structures emphasise spatial experience, sensory immersion, and emotional connection to the environment despite having different contexts and architectural languages.

On the other hand, Yin Yu Tang and the Neufert House adopt an inward-looking approach. Both, motivated by functional standardisation or cultural tradition, emphasise enclosure, order, and clarity. Yin Yu Tang uses decoration and room placement to convey the spatial hierarchy symbolically, whereas the Neufert House depends on a strict

5.2. Reflection on the role of Feng Shui compared to Western standards, discussing strengths and weaknesses of both approaches.

Despite their different cultural origins, there are notable similarities between Feng Shui and Western architectural standards in terms of spatial thinking. Despite having different justifications, both deal with movement, hierarchy, light, materiality, and zoning. Efficiency, circulation width, ergonomics, and standardised spatial modules are measurable parameters given priority in Western systems such as Neufert's Bauentwurfslehre. In contrast, the Raumpilot broadens this perspective by considering contextual sensitivity, transformation potential, and user perception, aligning with experiential concerns.

It emphasises spatial harmony, similar to Feng Shui, which is founded on cosmological and symbolic principles. Like user-oriented Western designs, it specifies buffer zones, preferred orientations, and material balances. Although concepts like "intuitive circulation" and "Qi flow" differ, both seek to create comfortable, balanced spaces.

Ultimately, the comparison demonstrates that, despite differing explanations, Feng Shui and Western frameworks frequently produce similar results. Both traditions have an underlying concern for human well-being, the quality of space, and the interaction between people and their built environments. This implies that functionally motivated and culturally based design are complementary strategies rather than diametrically opposed ones for dealing with related spatial issues.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Summary of findings.

This thesis investigated whether the perceived advantages of Feng Shui are rooted in universal spatial characteristics or culturally specific design principles. The comparative study shows that although Feng Shui provides a rich framework of symbols, its fundamental design elements, such as flow, zoning, material use, and orientation, are very similar to those of functionalist Western architecture. Comfort, harmony, and spatial clarity, frequently associated with Feng Shui, can also be attained through non-symbolic, user-centred design. Its strength appears to be in creating emotionally responsive environments rather than having a metaphysical effect.

6.2. Highlighting the significance of research for architecture and design.

The results add to the discussion between empirically structured and culturally grounded design methodologies. Even when taken from its original context, feng shui provides helpful spatial strategies that can be delicately incorporated into modern architectural thinking, especially regarding atmosphere, material choice, and orientation. This is particularly important for wellness-focused areas, hospitality, and residential architecture.

According to this comparison, many Feng Shui principles are similar to Western spatial logic but have different terminology: Western design refers to intuitive circulation, while Feng Shui uses the term "Qi flow." In Western examples, accessibility and functionality are shaped, whereas, in traditional Chinese homes, symbolic placement defines the hierarchy. Therefore, these systems might be culturally unique manifestations of universal human spatial instincts.

By acknowledging these similarities, architects can view Feng Shui as an alternative design language with similar objectives to evidence-based planning rather than as a strange or mystical system. Adopting both measurable and subjective aspects of spatial experience can lead to more comprehensive design approaches that take into account users' needs on several levels.

6.3. Outlook: Hybrid approaches and applications in public spaces.

Future architectural practice may benefit from hybrid approaches that blend the practical rigour of the West with the intuitive depth of Feng Shui. Without depending on complete cosmological frameworks, design features based on cultural awareness, emotional comfort, and spatial transitions can improve user well-being in public and semi-public buildings, such as schools, community centres, or healthcare settings.

Architects can create inclusive and meaningful spaces by combining universally recognised design logic with culturally embedded spatial reasoning. Integrating symbolic orientation, natural materials, and intuitive movement patterns will become crucial tools for designing architecture that speaks to people from different cultural backgrounds as global design increasingly negotiates multicultural realities.

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Fig. 17 Outside Neufert House Photo by Neufert Foundation

Fig. 18 Study Room Neufert House, Photo by Neufert Foundation

Fig. 19 Analysis: Garden of the Neufert House, original Floorplan underneath from Neufert Foundation, notes by Clara Soltész

Fig. 20 First Floor and Elevation Analysis of the Neufert House, original Floorplan underneath from Neufert Foundation, notes by Clara Soltész

Fig. 21 Second Floor Analysis of the Neufert House, original Floorplan underneath from Neufert Foundation, notes by Clara Soltész

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Fig. 22 Fallingwater from the Outside by ArchDaily

Fig. 23 First Floor Analysis Fallingwater, original Floorplan underneath fromArchDaily, notes by Clara Soltész

Fig. 24 Second Floor Analysis Fallingwater, original Floorplan underneath fromArchDaily, notes by Clara Soltész