

A deeper cleansing

By DIANNA MARDER
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PHILADELPHIA — Jacqueline and John Shultz decided to smudge after buying a home in Philadelphia's Society Hill that had a weird vibe.

Mind you, they had never really heard of the concept of smudging — an ancient technique using the smoke of sage to release psychic energy.

But the Shultzes, both self-respecting conservatives with MBAs, knew something needed to be done. There was something ... odd about the place.

Even Dante, their pointer-Dalmatian, suspected something was amiss. They brought the dog with them when they cleaned the house.

"He behaved strangely," Jacqueline recalled. "He would stand at each doorway and stop. He didn't want to go in any further. Especially the bedrooms."

"Perhaps some illicit activity had taken place there," she continued. "We didn't know. But we wanted to rid the air."

So one night, acting on advice from a friend, the Shultzes turned out all the lights, lighted some candles and walked through their new house waving sticks of incense.

"We stopped in each room and said something like: 'We want this room to have a new beginning and a fresh start with us as the new homeowners,'" Jacqueline said.

And?

"Once we went through that cleansing ritual,

we brought Dante back in, and he acted normal again."

Smudging, cleansing, purging, house blessing — no matter what it's called, almost every culture has a ritual for purifying a physical space. Such practices are becoming increasingly popular in Western homes.

Like feng shui, the Chinese system of drawing the highest good into one's life by rearranging and spacing furniture and other objects, smudging draws largely on Eastern philosophies — the belief that all things emit energy and that energy can linger past its prime.

Smudging is meant to remove the old energy and make way for the new.

Think of it as spiritual spring cleaning. If you were clearing a home office before turning it into a baby's room, you'd probably add a fresh coat of paint. Smudging clears the spiritual cobwebs.

Briefly, here's how it's done: Close all of the windows. Light a smudge stick, usually a tightly wound bundle of sage and cedar, and direct the smoke along the walls of the room you want to purify. Continue throughout the house, working your way downstairs and ending at an exit where you open a door or window to release the energy.

In concert with those physical steps, there is the spiritual component: your intention. State aloud what you want to release and what you want to make room for.

Usually, said Tish Byrne, a feng shui practitioner who also does house blessings, "I ask for peace, harmony, health, wealth, love and laugh-

ter."

Manly men do it, too

This is so not a girl thing.

Former basketball coach Phil Jackson did it in the Lakers locker room, right after Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant duked it out there.

And Eagles linebacker Dhani Jones did it last summer before moving into his Chestnut Hill, Pa., carriage house.

"Every place has energy," Jones said, "and the old energy has to be cleared, invited out, so the new energy can take over."

That's why he hired Byrne to smudge his house.

"Your home should be your sanctuary, where you can be instead of do," Byrne said. "Where you can breathe and relax."

Before Jones moved in, Byrne went through the house, burning cedar and sage and flicking her fingers while chanting the Chinese Six True Sounds: om ma ne pa ne hum.

Seek your own meaning

At Aphrodite's Dove, a shop in Jenkintown, Pa., the shelves are stocked with supplies for all sorts of self-help rituals: incense in cone and stick form; crystals; and "transformational candles" designed to infuse your home with anything from prosperity, inspiration and success to courage, ingenuity, wisdom and tranquility. Not

See CLEANSING, Page 5D

Smudging, a ritual for purifying a physical space, on the rise



CLEANSING

Continued from Page 3D

to mention your basic everlasting love.

This is the place to find smudge sticks: bundles of sage and cedar.

And sage itself.

It comes in individual baggies or in six-packs — loose, in bundles, and in convenient oil or spray cans for those with allergies to smoke, or who have homes with particularly sensitive smoke detectors.

Periodically, shopkeeper Kirsten Houseknecht teaches free smudging classes in the back room. Some common elements are universally employed, she says: smoke, sound, light and liquid.

The smoke may be from incense, herbs or sage.

The sound could be chanting, praying, singing, ringing bells or clapping. Light from a candle and liquid in the form of water, honey or wine.

So, for example, in Latin cultures the floor may be washed with milk for purification.

And Jewish kitchens are ritually purified as kosher using hot water and prayer before they can be used for cooking.

Intent is what matters, Houseknecht says.

"Whatever ritual you do has to have meaning for you," she says, "if it's going to be powerful."

'... get rid of this guy'

Erva Baden stands in the center of her Bryn Mawr, Pa., apartment stating her intention:

"I would like to bring energetic closure to a relationship I had last year. This gentleman was frequently in my apartment, and I would like to allow new energy to enter."

Nicely put. And in case the spirit of Mr. Cad doesn't understand plain English, she summarizes:

"We need to get rid of this guy."

Her friend Mirabai Galashan, a life coach, interfaith minister and Reiki (natural healing) master, is here to help Baden smudge the space.

Galashan lights one of the candles on Baden's coffee table, and from that she lights a sage stick.

She smudges Baden first, waving the stick from head to toe, front and back.

Then she proceeds to carry the burning smudge stick around the apartment, using a shell to catch the ashes.

She directs smoke toward every corner, down the walls, and across the baseboards, into the crevices, onto the plush pillows and especially onto doorways and mirrors.

Addressing the old energy directly, Galashan says, "We are sending you on your way with blessings. You are healed. You are forgiven. You are released."

Just for good measure, Galashan rings a set of Tibetan bells called tingshas.

Within an hour of Galashan's departure, the phone rings. It's Mr. X, who hasn't been heard from in months.

Just checking in, he tells Baden's answering machine. He says he senses something may be up.

She does not return the call.