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Vedic homes seek better living through architecture

By Brandy Welvaert

If you knew you'd have a better chance of staying married, feeling creative, making money and living a healthy life by living in the right kind of house, would you consider building it?

Jon Lipman has helped many people do just that. As the foremost Western architect practicing Sthapatya Vedic architecture, an ancient form of design based on natural laws, Mr. Lipman considers it part of his job to think about his clients' overall well-being when he creates homes for them.

"I had an aspiration to figure out how to do the most good for my clients. What I discovered in the course of my career is that we architects really don't know how to do that," he said in a recent telephone interview from his office at Maharishi Global Construction just west of Fairfield, Iowa, in Maharishi Vedic City.

The area around Fairfield is a mecca for homes built under the auspices of Vedic design. In fact, Maharishi Vedic City itself, founded by followers of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who brought Transcendental Meditation to the United States, is designed according to Vedic principles.

Most people spend about 90 percent of their time indoors, and Vedic architecture, at its core, rests upon the idea that buildings affect the people who live in them, Mr. Lipman said.

"When I learned that the oldest architectural discipline in the world contains the rules, I was very eager. And my practice has been transformed because Vedic architecture does contain the laws of nature regarding how a building affects the lives of its occupants," he said.

How? By following the rules.

To start, Vedic homes face east. Rooms inside are arranged so they take in the sun's light as it passes overhead. They contain a central space -- known as the brahmasthan, or "silent core."



Maharishi Vedic City, Iowa



The “brahmasthan”—the silent center of a Vedic home

The brahmasthan draws interest because of its central location. No one walks there, talks there or does much of anything there. It’s a space designed after the quiet centers found in the natural universe: the nucleus of a cell or an atom, the sun and the eye of a storm.

“The brahmasthan is the point in the middle of the thing that maintains the wholeness of the entire thing. Take the brahmasthan out and the thing doesn’t hang together,” the architect explained.

Despite these features, one might not distinguish a Vedic home from any other home at first glance.

Many are long, in order to capture as much light from the east as possible. Most have skylights and plenty of windows, and a small golden roof ornament called a kalash.

The homes pictured recently in media across the nation are beautifully decorated in an array of styles -- ostensibly to suit the

owners. Just like any other house.

In the last decade, about \$250 million in Vedic construction has gone up in North America, about a third of that in the Fairfield area.

According to Mr. Lipman and his contemporaries, Vedic homes cause their dwellers to lead more whole, healthful lives.

Sound hard to believe? He doesn’t think so.

“The sun (has) the most powerful influence (over) natural law on earth. And so it’s not shocking to conceive that the sun has a variety of influences on us. As a concept, it’s not far-fetched.”

“It is a bit harder to accept the fact -- which I say is a fact -- that if we live in a building that faces the east, that building will have an influence on us of enlightenment, affluence and fulfillment. Whereas if we were to live in a house that faces west, it will have an influence of poverty and lack of creativity or vitality.”

He gave two examples of how architecture directly has affected people’s behavior and health. In one example, he explained that a Wal-Mart store with one skylight consistently sold more merchandise -- regardless of what kind of merchandise it was -- beneath the light.

In another example, he explained how a hospital’s patients housed in an east-facing wing were released twice as fast as other patients with all other factors being equal.

These instances and more flesh out “Maharishi Vedic Architecture: Background and Summary of Scientific Research,” a research paper provided by the Maharishi University of Management, the university in Maharishi Vedic City.

Mr. Lipman thinks many people have a hard time believing that Vedic architecture works because it’s not rooted in the dominant scientific paradigm of this century and the last. Instead, Vedic architecture has roots in ancient Sanskrit texts.

“In fact, it’s more than ancient. I would like to say to you that it is eternal,” he said.

Because Vedic architecture is important in the East, only people living there could access it before the Maharishi integrated ideas from several Sanskrit sources and brought the practice to the United States

Ultimately, Mr. Lipman thinks Vedic architecture helps people lead fuller lives.

“It’s really a basic principal of nature’s own architecture. In nature, everything is perfectly integrated and sustained by everything else. Not so in the man-made environment. But it can be so if we use nature’s own organization -- the principles that maintain the connection between the individual intelligence and the cosmic.”

What makes a house Vedic?

What distinguishes Vedic architecture? Architect Jon Lipman, its foremost Western practitioner, offered the following principles as a guide:

Orientation: Vedic architecture’s single biggest concern. All homes face east because rays from the rising sun are considered most healthy.

Sunlight: Vedic homes use big windows and skylights to capture as much natural light as much as possible.

Materials: Much Vedic construction uses green building practices.

Placement: Vedic architects consider what will take place in a given room before deciding where the room will be located in the house.

Influences: They also consider the landscape where the home will live, taking into account nearby sights such as hills, buildings and ponds.

The brahmasthan: A home’s “silent core,” a place reserved for quiet. Sometimes it takes the form of a foyer that is “set aside in some way that we know not to walk on it,” Mr. Lipman said. Sometimes its floor is raised, or it includes special plants or a fountain. Ideally, in this climate, sunlight will reach this core through a cupola or skylight.

Resources

For more information about Sthapatya Vedic Architecture, you can:

- visit Maharishi Vedic City at www.maharishivediccity.net/, a Web site about the city near Fairfield, Iowa.
- visit Maharishi Global Architecture at www.mgc-vastu.com/, where you can find information about architecture, including step-by-step information for having a Vedic home built for you.
- contact the Maharishi University of Management’s “Creating Peace” program to learn about upcoming lectures and programs featuring Vedic architecture. To see an event schedule, visit www.creatingpeace.mum.edu or call (641) 919-1898.
- see the 25,000-square-foot Golden Domes on the university campus and other Vedic buildings on a half-day tour, held Fridays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, call (641) 472-9580. Reservations must be made at least 48 hours in advance.