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Building has an ancient touch

Oil firm CEO says that Vedic principles promote clearer thinking

By Nancy Sarnoff

Feng shui, the ancient Chinese philosophy that's supposed to achieve harmony and balance through design and placement, has a rival: Vedic architecture.

A building that just opened in The Woodlands has been constructed according to Vedic principles, a 5,000-year-old building practice from India that predates feng shui.

The building's owner is an energy company executive who's leasing out the ground floor to a Transcendental Meditation group, founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who also happens to be a proponent of Vedic architecture.

The oil company, Century Exploration, will occupy the remainder of the 18,000-square-foot building.

Vedic buildings typically face east, have lots of windows and are constructed with nontoxic materials.

"The effect is clearer thinking," said building owner Howard Settle, chief executive of Lexington, Ky.-based Century Exploration.

The building, dubbed The Woodlands Peace Palace, is located at 10210 Grogan's Mill Road.

Settle brought in architect Sue Weller from Kentucky to design the project, along with Galveston-based designer Ray Truitt.

The cost of constructing the building was not available, but Settle expects to pay a 25 percent premium over a conventional office building.

He has seen the benefits of this type of design before.

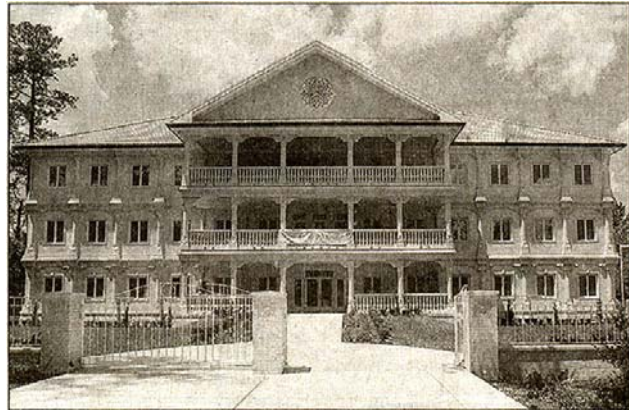
After he built his Kentucky home in accordance to Vedic principles in 2000, Settle said he slept better, felt more energized and his allergies disappeared.

Two years later, this lifelong meditator had his corporate headquarters in Lexington developed in the same way.

"We've had unprecedented success since we moved in," Settles said, noting that the company has reported a sixfold rise in revenue.

While he recognizes that many oil and gas companies have been making vast amounts of money of late, Settle said his company has found more opportunities for oil exploration that aren't related to the soaring price of oil and natural gas.

"There's no way for me or anyone else to make an absolute direct link between the Vedic architecture and the increase in revenues we've enjoyed, but from a subjective point of view, seeing how my people are working together and creating more opportunities, I'd say it's working," he said.



THE VEDIC WAY: The Woodlands Peace Palace, at 10210 Grogan's Mill Road in The Woodlands, was built according to the principles of a 5,000-year-old Asian building practice.