

HOUSE

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Enlightened Design

Vedic architecture employs ancient design principles to promote peace and well-being.

BY SUSAN HODARA, PHOTOS BY LINDA BELL HALL

In the four years that Terry and Bernard Nevas have lived in their Weston, Conn., home, their lives, they will tell you, have never been better. Their sleep is refreshing, their meals are nourishing, their work is productive. Though their two children are grown, Ms. Nevas says she feels "a deepening richness of experience within our family." As for their 30-year marriage, Mr. Nevas says, "We had a perfect marriage before we moved into our vastu, and now it is even more perfect."

The Nevases' vastu is their airy, sun-filled, 4,200-square-foot home situated at the top of a winding, tree-lined driveway. "Vastu" is the Indian word for a structure built according to the ancient architectural principles known as Sthapathya Ved—one of 40 Vedic bodies of knowledge dating back to 2500 B.C. and addressing a range of topics from the arts to the



All Vedic buildings have a Brahmasthan in the exact center. "The Brahmasthan is the center of lively silence that supports everything else in the house."—Terry Nevas

sciences. Sthapathya Ved, which some say lent concepts to the Chinese feng shui, dictates the precise layout, orientation, and dimensions—down to 1/16 of an inch—for a building that is aligned most closely with the laws of nature, and thereby maximizes the well-being of its inhabitants.

Currently in the planning stages is the first Sthapathya Ved home in New York. The house will be built on four acres in Bedford Hills by Elizabeth and Hollis Taggart, who are currently renting in



The front door faces east, to promote affluence and fulfillment. The rooftop finials, or kalashes, connect the inhabitants to the cosmos, and at the home's exact center is the Brahmasthan.

Bedford, and who have constructed two other Sthapathya Ved homes, one in Boone, N.C., and one on Kiawah Island, S.C. What convinced them to build a Sthapathya Ved house here, says Ms. Taggart, a writer, was their seven-year-old son, Lincoln. "After we'd been in our rental for seven months, he told me, 'I love this house, but I don't feel as protected here,' she says. "That was last February. We started looking for land in March."

Terry and Bernard Nevas learned of Sthapathya Ved through their over 30 years of meditation and involvement with Transcendental Meditation. They are the directors of the Maharishi Enlightenment Center of Mid-Fairfield County, currently located in their home, where they teach meditation. They built



The homeowners, directors of the Maharishi Enlightenment Center of Mid-Fairfield County, say of their home, "It all feels right."

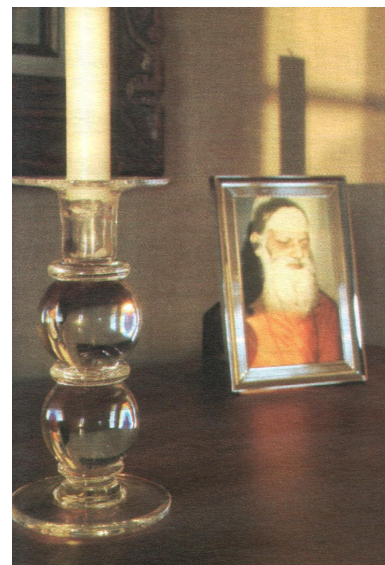
their house in collaboration with Neil Hauck, of Neil Hauck Architects, LLC, in Darien, Conn., and a Sthapathya Ved architectural consultant in Iowa responsible for ensuring that the design conformed to Vedic principles.

Sthapathya Ved buildings have been constructed across the globe in an assortment of styles, including log cabins, Swiss chalets, and stone villas. The Taggart home, says Ms. Taggart, blends "the best of American architecture." The Nevas residence is a hybrid, says Hauck, of "colonial and Connecticut farmhouse with classical Italianate influences." But regardless of size, form, or location, all such homes have common elements.

On a side table stands a portrait of Guru Dev, the teacher of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi is founder of Transcendental Meditation and the homeowners' teacher.

One is a fence surrounding the structure; the Nevases' is white picket. "The vastu fence delineates an area around the house that is protected," says Mr. Nevas. "Its placement is determined mathematically."

Atop the house are five conical finials—kalashes, in Sanskrit—positioned where sections of the roof intersect. Their role, Mr. Nevas explains, is to connect the individual to the cosmos, and he adds, he and Ms. Nevas have experienced their power. While constructing another Sthapathya Ved home in North Carolina a decade ago, they made regular visits to



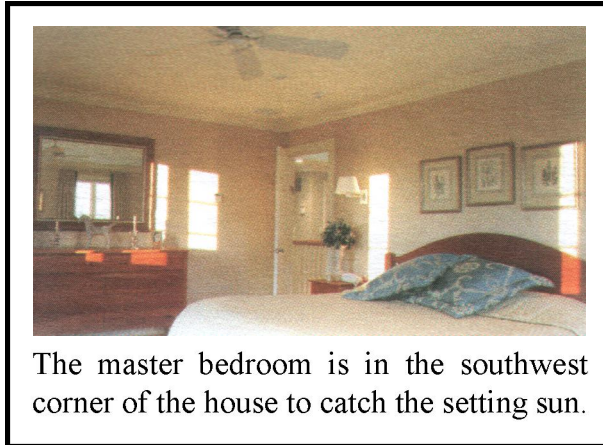
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monitor its progress. "At one point," Mr. Nevas says, "we arrived at night. It hadn't been long since our last visit, and not much had been done, but something was different. We felt peaceful and energized, but we didn't know why. The next morning, we saw that the kalash had been placed on the roof."

Another feature of a Vedic home is its Brahmasthan, the exact center, again measured mathematically and sized in proportion to the rest of the house. "The Brahmasthan is the center of lively silence that supports everything else in the house," says Ms. Nevas. Within the Nevases' Brahmasthan sits a table holding an ornate floral arrangement. The area surrounding it is demarcated by four floor-to-ceiling columns, and the Brahmasthan itself extends to the roof, where it is bordered by windows on all sides. "Nothing travels through the Brahmasthan," says Ms. Nevas. "It is a space that is unused."

The Nevases' front door is well used, however, because it faces east in what was determined to be the most auspicious place to enter the house. According to Vedic principles, the orientation of the entrance governs an array of influences. East, the

most advantageous direction, promotes enlightenment and fulfillment, while south, the least desirable, brings destruction and loss. If an east-facing entryway is impossible, north is an acceptable alternative. Mr. Hauck notes that, although he would normally have centered the Nevases' door, Vedic calculations required that it be shifted off-center.



The master bedroom is in the southwest corner of the house to catch the setting sun.

The placement of rooms and the orientation of some of the furnishings also follow Sthapathya Ved wisdom. The kitchen is in the southeast corner, "where the warmth of the sun kindles digestive qualities," Ms. Nevas says. Sinks face north and stoves face east. "In India, much of Vedic

knowledge has been lost," she notes, "but people still know to put their stoves against the east wall."

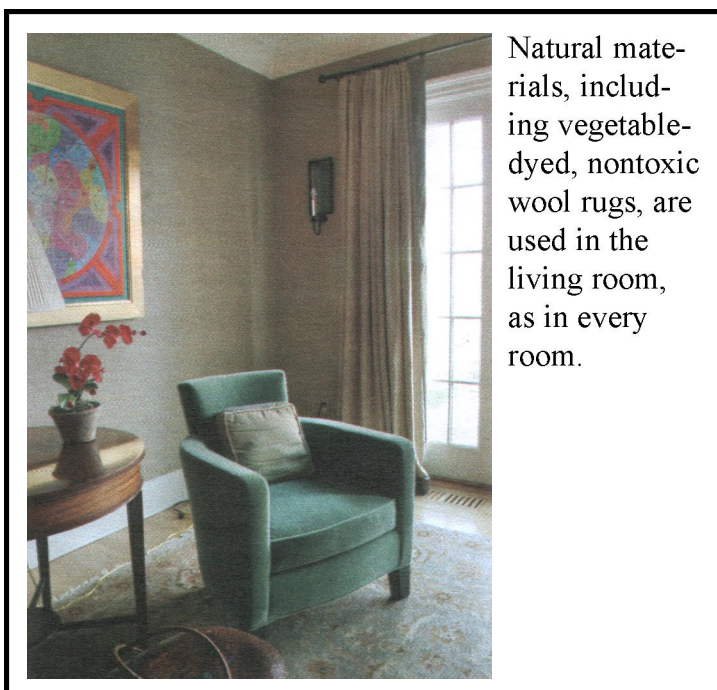
Natural materials, including vegetable-dyed, nontoxic wool rugs, are used in the living room, as in every room.

The dining room is on the south side, where, Ms. Nevas continues, "the rays of the midday sun are good for the metabolism." While it is ideal to face east while eating, she acknowledges, "it would be pretty unsociable if everybody always faced east," and adds that she sits opposite her husband when they dine.

Mr. Nevas's office is in the southwest corner ("where the man's office should be," Ms. Nevas says), with a corner desk facing east and north. A meditation room, a feature in all Sthapathya Ved homes, is off the entryway on the northeast side; it is, she says, "for quiet purposes—meditation, praying, doing yoga."

Upstairs, the master bedroom faces southwest ("to catch the setting sun"). The children's bedrooms follow dictates for male and female child: south side and north side, respectively. All beds are positioned so sleepers lie with their heads to the east. Even the bathroom abides by the Veda, with toilet and sink facing north.

An important aspect of Sthapathya Ved is the use of



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natural materials, which affected numerous choices throughout the Nevases' house. They heat and cool their home with a geothermal system that uses an electric pump to draw in subterranean water. The walls are six inches thick and insulated with cellulose instead of fiberglass. (A renewable-energy expert advised them that solar power was not an appropriate option for their location, as they would have to rely heavily on backup sources).

The wood floors have a water-based finish. Wall coverings are made from natural grasses and cloth applied with nontoxic paste; walls that are painted use low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint. Tiles are ceramic; furniture fibers are cotton, linen, or silk; rugs are vegetable-dyed, nontoxic wool. The beds are made in organic cotton sheets and wool mattress pads. An organic lawn-care service cares for the garden.

The bottom line, the Nevases avow, is that their quality of life has been enhanced. "We followed the requirements to a T," Ms. Nevas says. "It all feels right."

The Nevases are not alone in acclaiming the benefits of Sthapathya Ved. Houseguests, Ms. Nevas says, "come for a day and stay for a week." Ms. Taggart notes that since moving to her non-Sthapathya Ved rental, "I don't have the same vitality as I did in Boone. Fatigue is harder to flush out." In Boone, she continues, "I'd never experienced such a flow with my writing. When we moved to Bedford, it kind of dried up."

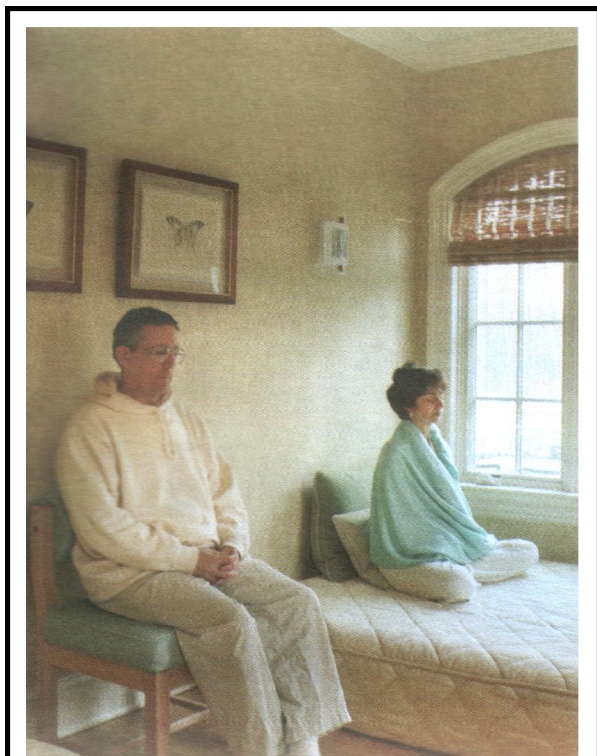
Hauck agrees that the design of the Nevas house brings positive influences to the family, but says, "My personal belief is that it works two ways. The Nevases are peaceful, intelligent, and enlightened, and they in turn charge their house with positive energy. There is a constant cycling, similar to the process of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation."

"The whole basis of Vedic architectural principles is to create as healthy an environment as possible," he continues, "starting with the individual room, extending to the individual building, and aiming toward the construction of ideal towns and cities. These priorities are quite different from those for most buildings being built today, where the driving forces tend to be style, function, or profit."

Mr. Nevas illuminates those priorities further: "Maharishi has stated that the reason world peace cannot be attained, despite ongoing efforts for so many centuries, is that people are living in homes that create unpeaceful individuals. That is why it is so important that more people live in Sthapathya Ved houses. Basically, this is a massive reconstruction program to create world peace." Until that is accomplished, those like the Nevases and the Taggarts are pursuing personal peace. "The body houses our faculties and our souls," says Ms. Taggart. "The house houses our bodies. There is great potential for the home to serve its inhabitants more than we know."

"Day and night, it adds up," she continues. "If you know it's available, and you can provide it to your family—that's what life's about."

To tour the Nevas house, call (203) 227-7590 or e-mail Media@CTPeacePalace.org.



Bernard and Terry Nevas, meditating. A meditation room is a feature in all Sthapathya Ved homes.

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