



VEDIC ARCHITECTURE

A millenary practice is reborn

A discipline rooted in ancient knowledge is gaining followers and new credibility

By Lillian Delgado de Vecchiarelli

It all began about 5,000 years ago. The principles of sacred architecture were part of ancient oral traditions in India and, eventually, were written down in Sanskrit around 2500 BC. Sacred architecture, Vastu Shastra or Vedic Architecture is exemplified in one of the Wonders of the World, the Taj Mahal, and in other beautiful structures in India. For approximately the last two decades these principles, which emphasize the importance of a building's orientation to the cardinal directions (true north, south, east and west), its proportion (according to specific mathematical equations), and its relationship to the sun, have been applied to buildings all over the world. In the United States alone there is over \$500 million in Vedic construction - and there is even a Vedic city in the American heartland.

According to one staunch proponent, developer Jeffrey Abramson, "Vedic architecture aligns the intelligence of every individual in the building with the cosmic intelligence of the whole universe." Its purpose is "to build for the health and happiness of everyone"; moreover, "it also fosters prosperity, opening doors to good fortune." If these words sound too far-fetched, hold your skepticism. Neuroscientists, the National Institutes of Health, and world-renowned architectural luminaries such as Professor Emeritus Keith Critchlow of the Royal College of Art in London are among those either fully endorsing the validity of Vedic principles, or seriously investigating their effects. Although not related to Vedic sciences, the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture (a collaboration of architects and neuroscientists) is studying the effect of dwellings on the human brain and on people's physiology. (The popular Chinese practice of Feng-shui, which claims the placement of objects can eliminate negative energies, is believed to have its roots in Vedic sciences.)

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Vedic Architecture balances the far and near influences of the sun, moon, planets and stars with reference to the north and south poles and the equator.

Architect Jonathan Lipman, a Cornell graduate and former president of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, is one of the foremost experts on Vedic architecture. He was instrumental in the design of the first American Vedic community, Maharishi Vedic City, which sits on 550 acres near Fairfield, Iowa and was built according to the tenets of Vedic design: first and foremost that all houses face “the auspicious east”, that they be enclosed by a vestu fence (a mathematically determined fence with an east gate), that they have an inner core or a courtyard (Brahmasthan), and a quiet room for meditation.

With close to 200 homes, a university (the Maharishi University of Management), a hotel, a world-class spa, schools, organic farms, an observatory, and a medical facility (the College of Vedic Medicine, recipient of a grant from the National Institutes of Health as part of their program to foster alternative therapies and treatments), Maharishi

Vedic City, incorporated in 2001, has its own mayor and city council. It apparently also has a disproportionate share of entrepreneurial and economic success that brings close to \$8 billion a year to the area. As Rashi Galzer, co-director of the Center for Marketing and Technology at the University of California at Berkeley declared to *The Washington Post*, “For a small town in the Midwest to have so many successful businesses is really unbelievable.” The majority of these business owners are practitioners of Transcendental Meditation (TM) who came to Iowa to be near the Maharishi University, founded by Indian guru Maharishi Mhesh Yogi who in the 1960s introduced TM to the Western world—and to The Beatles. (He now lives in the Netherlands.)

Residents of Vedic City (and owners of Vedic houses elsewhere) claim profound changes occurred when they moved into their homes: increased calm, focus, vitality and happiness. Lipman tells us that his first Vedic

project was a partial remodeling, “The day after the vestu fence was finished, the owner told me of an unusual happening. He said, ‘The construction workers stopped cursing! Their demeanor is completely different; they are even listening to a station with softer music!’ This change continued throughout the construction.” Lipman reminds us he did not know Vedic design or its effects. “It was then that I decided to dedicate myself to this technique: if one element from it could have such an impact on people, what would it be like if the whole technology was used in buildings?”

“Although the knowledge of Vedic architecture has existed in India for thousands of years,” adds Lipman, “Maharishi felt it was not intact so he conducted a lengthy project to put the technique back together. Once this was done and tested, he discovered that it really fosters enlightenment, health and prosperity and concluded that everyone should have the opportunity to benefit from it.” This commitment entails rebuilding the world’s cities – a task of whose enormity Lipman is keenly aware. He remains committed to its achievement, citing the industrial revolution

as an analogy. “It made Glasgow, London and many other cities grow very rapidly. People drained the countryside and moved into what we now call slums, and it was discovered within a couple of generations that the quality of life had deteriorated enormously. Diseases spread: there were no sewage systems, and living in such high density quarters increased the crime rate. Historically, when patterns of harmful urban construction become intolerable, citizens and governments do something: they put in sewage systems, they tear down slums, and they rebuild. They do it because the imperative is there.”

Vedic proponents believe that the imperative to change our cities will become more evident as people experience living and working in Vedic structures. In the meantime, medical and statistical information is still being gathered. “It will,” says Lipman, “demonstrate how Vedic construction can positively impact crime, productivity, accident, and hospital occupancy rates, thus validating these assertions as true and placebo independent.”

If you are not ready to tear down your abode but are nevertheless interested in trying the Vedic way, Lipman suggests two things: sleep

All Vedic houses should be properly aligned with an auspicious eastern entrance facing the sunrise.



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Above: An important feature of Vedic architecture is the silent core in the center of the house, which is called the Brahmathan.
 Left: These homes all share an orientation to the east and placement of rooms is according to the transit of the path of the sun.

with your head pointed east (to promote a good, replenishing sleep), and avoid entering your home from the very inauspicious south side (east and north are best). Before you scoff, take notice: the School of Medicine at the University of Milan conducted a test by placing bipolar patients in rooms facing east. The same number of similarly afflicted patients remained in rooms facing west; the east room patients recovered in half the time.

Most Vedic architects and builders practice Transcendental Meditation. Jeffrey Ambranson, a partner in the family-owned real estate firm The Tower Companies, says he discovered TM, “When I was 33 years old and read that there were 18 scientific research studies indicating that it promoted creativity, clear decision making, self-actualization, as well as vitality and inner strength (today there are more than 600 studies, conducted in 33 countries at 210 institutions, including Harvard). Since it is an effortless technique, not a philosophy or doctrine, it can be practiced by anyone.”

At 2000 Tower Oaks Boulevard, the 200,000 square-foot office complex he is developing in Rockville, Maryland at a cost of \$7 million, and strictly following Vedic technique, there will be a meditation room on each floor in the north-east corner, the most propitious, Abramson says, “for lessening of activity, as opposed to the north-west or south-west, which increases activity.” In the meditation rooms there will be no telephone; employees will be able to practice TM, which requires two 20-minute sessions a day, pray or simply relax.

As the first fully Vedic building of its kind in the country, 2000 Tower Oaks Boulevard will be the jewel in the crown of Vedic architecture in the United States (architects: Kishimoyo, Gordon, Dalaya PC Architecture of McLean, Virginia with Jonathan Lipman as Vedic

2000 Tower Oaks Boulevard is being developed by The Tower Companies in Rockville, Maryland, strictly following Vedic principles.



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The Vedic Observatory in Maharishi Vedic City, Iowa, displays in one compact form the whole structure of the universe.

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consultant). It will, naturally, face east and the dawning sun, which according to Vedic science, Abramson explains “is the most important influence on us as it moves during the day; it affects all – everyone is hungry around midday.”

The Tower Companies, is the only real estate developer on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s list of the top 25 industry leaders in Green Power purchase. 2000 Tower Oaks will be as green as the Maryland meadows. “Green principles go hand in hand with Vedic architecture,” Abramson tell us, “In Tower Oaks we are achieving a 41 percent reduction of energy use and a 49 percent reduction in water use over any building built today. We are turning the air over every 55 minutes: the outside air is coming in and replenishing the inside.”

Vedic architecture, like green building, costs “about 2 percent above regular construction,” says Abramson, who is certain the financial

rewards will make businesses and tenants take notice. “You are creating a building different from someone else’s, and you are doing it in the name of health and prosperity, people see this as added value. Corporations would bring beneficial assets to overall business, keeping employees healthy and attracting better employees. If you are influencing employees, you are creating a catalyst for success.

“Materials for 2000 Tower Oaks,” adds Abramson, “will come from within 500 miles [of the site], thus supporting local economies and reducing pollution and energy in the delivery.” He is very excited by the fact that “we are able to reduce artificial light by almost 50 percent compared to any other typical building: by using free lighting from the outdoors!” We must ask ourselves: Why is this so new? “I believe it’s because there has not been any real evolution in building for decades - since the introduction of the elevator, concrete and steel, and air conditioning. I truly believe this is a renaissance.” 🏰