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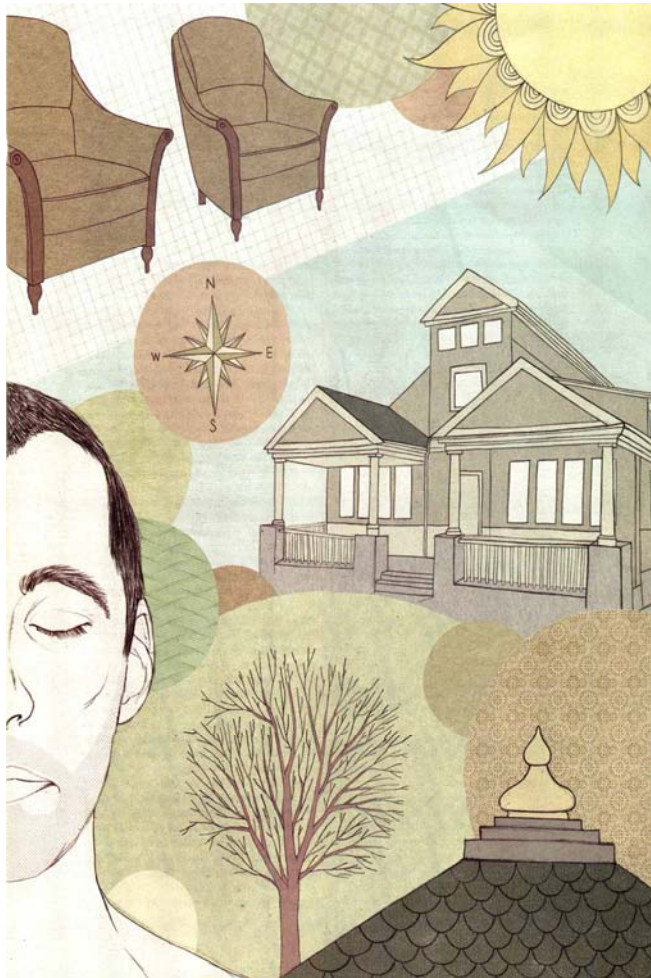
TRENDS FOR THE MODERN TRAVELER

July 15, 2005

LIFESTYLE FEATURE

Home and Peace

By William Kissell



Using the ancient architectural secrets of Vedic design, you could possibly transform your house into a holistic home.

Len Oppenheim considers himself a skeptic. So the Wall Street trader can't say with any certainty whether his headaches came to an end simply because he and his wife, Dena, moved from the suburbs of San Francisco to a rural farmhouse near Fairfield, Iowa. Or if his health improved due to the fact that the house on 14 rolling acres was built following the architectural guidelines of an ancient Sanskrit text called Sthapatya Veda, which suggests there's a correlation between human harmony and the orientation, spatial, and material elements of one's home.

"How much of it is a self-fulfilling prophecy, I really can't say. All I can tell you is [that I find] I sleep better and wake with more energy," says Oppenheim, adding that a new sense of calmness has come over

him in business, too. "I still have my ups and downs in the [stock] market," he says. "But I seem to find that the setbacks don't affect my mood as much."

Oppenheim's experience doesn't surprise Jonathan Lipman, AIA, chief architect of Maharishi Global Construction (MGC), the Iowa-based company that designed and built the Oppenheim's 7,000-square-foot Sthapatya Veda, or simply Vedic, home, along with

hundreds of others across the nation. “Every architect has had the experience that some buildings foster quality of life and others seem to be failures not because they don’t function, but because they don’t nurture the end users,” says Lipman, who, along with a growing legion of architects and scholars, believes that by using the principles of Vedic design, it’s possible to incorporate health benefits and good fortune directly into a home’s foundation. And a growing number of architects and home builders are beginning to put these principles to the test in their designs for the average American family.

The blueprint for this challenge comes from writings thought by western Sanskrit experts to date back to 2,500 B.C. or earlier of ancient Indian Rishis, or seers, who claim to have intuitively understood the laws of physics, the science of nature, and the cosmos, among other things. In these texts, they concluded the human body is somehow reactive to the movements of the sun, as well as spatial orientation. Over centuries of interpretation, the original Sthapatya Veda text one of 40 dealing with everything from music, art, and philosophy to medicine and city planning was modified and morphed by the Chinese into the similar concept of feng shui.

Twenty-five years ago, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Indian guru who introduced Transcendental Meditation to the world in the 1960s, made it his mission to put the pieces of the original Sanskrit text back together. In 1997, he established Maharishi Global Construction in the U.S. to create a prototypical development, Maharishi Vedic City, just outside Fairfield, Iowa, that would put this ancient architectural knowledge to the test. Today, that city is a thriving community containing more than 150 homes priced from \$200,000 to \$2 million, a 272-acre Maharishi University of Management campus, and a recently built College of Vedic Medicine, partially funded by an endowment from the National Institutes of Health, which often provides money for alternative sources of medicine. The area is also quite prosperous, with Cambridge Investment Research and other locally based firms filtering as much as \$8 billion in managed funds through Fairfield County and Maharishi Vedic City within the last year. That, combined with several other statistics, prompted Wired magazine to dub the farming community “Silicorn Valley.”

Vedic architecture is by no means limited to Iowa’s borders, however. In the past 10 years, MGC has worked on Vedic homes for clients in Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Austin, Texas; and Potomac, Maryland; it has retrofitted other homes with Vedic elements. The practice isn’t just confined to residential design. In addition to building the 27,000-square-foot Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center in Bakersfield, California, MGC is currently working with the Tower Companies, one of Washington’s largest commercial real-estate developers, on a 200,000-square-foot office building in Rockville, Maryland. The building is expected to be a prototypical smart-green workplace incorporating Vedic architecture and earth-friendly building materials.



What’s more, since MGC pioneered Vedic design principles nearly a decade ago,

other home builders and architectural firms, such as Lexington, Kentucky-based Veda Design and Boone, North Carolina-based Karu Architects, have instituted Vedic theory into many of their homes and office projects across the country. Florida-based builders Richard Bialosky and David Ederer are breaking ground this winter on Mandala Club, a 90-unit Vedic-designed planned residential community being built in Vero Beach. At its core, Vedic architecture proposes that the direction a building faces (east dissipates fear, disease, and poverty; west fosters health decline and loss of income), the size and placement of the rooms (based on mathematical formulas prevalent in the universe and nature), and the materials with which the building is made (all natural and nontoxic) all objectively influence the quality of life of the users. "It has nothing to do with the architectural style or the size of the home," offers MGC's Lipman. Instead, he says, it's usually a question of placement. "When I'm designing a house, I focus on where to place the kitchen, the master bedroom, the study, and the living room, based on different qualities of the sun's energies as it passes overhead," he says, noting that Vedic rules pinpoint living rooms in the central west portion of the house as more convivial, kitchens in the southeast corner for better digestibility, and master bedrooms in the southwest corner for being more conducive to rest. Although linked more to spirituality than to religion, all Vedic homes also have a meditation room in the northeast corner to strengthen the effect of meditation or prayer. And they all contain a Brahmasthan, or a silent central core, which literally translates into "establish wholeness."



The latter, explains Lipman, is not at the home's entrance, as some might assume, but rather at its center, acting as the home's axis, to harmonize with the universal laws of nature. "If we look at the things nature established, from largest to smallest, they each have a central core, and all the activities move around it. For example, a galaxy has a black hole; a solar system has a sun; cells in the body have a nucleus. This is one way nature maintains coherence. And when we use those same principles in architecture, we experience greater coherence in our houses."

Another important Vedic distinction, says Lipman, is the spatial relationship of each room to the others. "For instance, if you were to say you want your living room to be 24 by 36 feet, we might adjust those numbers to something like 23.9 by 37.5 feet so they'd resonate with the laws of nature and the solar system," he says. "Think of it as like tuning a violin. When a violin is perfectly tuned, the strings have this wonderful harmonic relationship, and if one string is slightly out of tune, it just doesn't sound right." When the rooms in a house are perfectly tuned, he adds, "It just feels better to live in."

Although studies suggest as many as three million Americans meditate daily, and at least 60 percent of the U.S. population has experimented on some level with alternative sources of medicine, convincing home buyers and builders to think Vedic has been a challenge, considering the lack of documented evidence to substantiate claims of better health, greater family harmony, or increased financial prosperity. Nevertheless, there are

some preliminary studies to suggest Vedic's orientation hypothesis might be right on target.

One scientific test conducted by the University of Milan School of Medicine, published in 2001 by the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, placed patients with similar degrees of bipolar depression in wings with both east-facing and west-facing windows, and found that those assigned east-facing rooms recovered, and were released, four days earlier. Another study, this one conducted by rural Iowa physician Veronica Butler, MD, showed patients who slept in north-facing beds suffered significantly more depression and anxiety than those who didn't. And there are even unrelated, nonscientific studies citing more burglaries to homes facing south than to those facing any other direction.

Vedic proponents believe such studies will one day prove useful to potential home buyers, offering valuable, nonstructural information about a house's history, such as divorce statistics, health issues, and financial pitfalls that have befallen its former owners. It will also give architects the tools to avoid inadvertently drawing such personal misfortunes into their plans. "At the moment, architects don't keep these statistics, because it doesn't occur to us that we have any way to influence that," says Lipman. "But just think about it. If you spend enough money, you can get a good wine cellar and a large swimming pool and exotic wood doors with fantastic hinges," he says. "After you spend all that money, is your marriage going to be better? Are you going to stay healthy, or are you still going to end up getting a chronic disease? This kind of knowledge is something money couldn't buy up to this point. But if you knew that simply by living in the house, it would improve the quality of your life, who wouldn't want that information?"

Building Principles

To find out more on the concept of Vedic architecture or to update your home contact one of these architects or builders.

Karu Architects
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