

Vedic architecture – the power of life-giving principles

by Cate Montana

On October 25, 2003, a fire began near the mountain town of Ramona in San Diego County, California. Fueled by acres of dry brush and fanned by strong Santa Ana winds, the Cedar Fire spread rapidly, burning 273,246 acres, destroying 2,232 homes, and killing 14 people. According to Jeff Harter, battalion chief of the California Fire Plan, California Department of Forestry, the speed and ferocity of the blaze "were heart stopping."

Jeanette Worland watched the fire approach across the hills, while her husband, Paul, hosed down the new home he had designed and built according to the principles of Maharishi Vedic Architecture. Pushed by 40 to 60 mph winds, the fire roared up to their home around midnight, then made a sudden 90 degree shift and passed directly outside of the house's Vastu fence. This sudden shift allowed the Worlands to evacuate – and it saved the house and everything in or near it. After shifting the blaze away from the house, minutes later the wind shifted back to its original direction and consumed the acreage directly behind the home.

The astonishing jog of the fire around the house was confirmed the next day by two fire fighters who noted with amazement that the fire seemed to lack the "desire" to destroy this house. Five other Maharishi Sthapatya Ved houses located within the fire's path were similarly spared with only smoke damage. One of the five was the only house among several in a cul-de-sac not to burn.

Fast forward to this year's recent devastation. The Worland's and several other people's Sthapatya Ved houses were spared again against all odds. What happened?

Miracles are considered the result of divine intervention. But miracles have also been defined as occurrences which seem inexplicable because the laws governing them are so subtle they have not yet been discovered. In the case of these six homes, the miracle of their preservation depended upon

principles that had been discovered, only many thousands of years ago in India.

Vedic architecture, or Vastu architecture, also known as Sthapatya Veda, is a system of architecture and city planning based in cosmic principles that was learned by the great Indian rishis and then recorded thousands of years ago in the texts of the Vedas. The Sanskrit word Sthapan means to establish. The Sanskrit word Veda means knowledge of Natural Law. As such, the system of Vedic architecture, which is still practiced and taught in India today, applies eternal cosmic principles to the built environment in which we work and dwell.

In the West, His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi studied the Sthapatya Vedas for many years, compiling and organizing much information that had apparently been lost and disorganized over the centuries. His system, called Maharishi Vedic architecture, Maharishi Vastu, or Maharishi Sthapatya Ved design, is taught today. It was the system by which all six homes that survived the Cedar Fire were designed and built.

Is it possible that the architectural design, based in life-giving principles of the cosmos, imbued the homes with a "grace" that sustained them even in the face of certain destruction?

Maharishi Sthapatya Ved

According to Jonathan Lipman AIA, owner of Jonathan Lipman AIA and Associates in Fairfield, Iowa, and director of the Institute of Maharishi Vedic architecture, Maharishi Vedic architecture is defined as "the most complete and ancient system of architecture and planning on Earth in accord with the solar, lunar and planetary influences on Earth with respect to the South Pole, North Pole and equator, connecting individual intelligence with cosmic intelligence, individual life with cosmic life."

This may sound "far out," but anyone with a high school diploma knows there are laws of nature that govern all the structures of nature – the galaxies, solar systems, stars, planets, animal life, plant life, cells, atoms, and subatomic particles. From the micro to the macro there are laws of nature that maintain perfect harmony and order in relationships throughout all creation.

Once you start looking, it's obvious that these principles exist, and it's not only the Indian rishis who have recognized them. Artists, philosophers, and scientists such as Leonardo de Vinci, Plato and Copernicus have developed entire astronomical, philosophic and artistic schools around the perfection of

mathematical proportion, perspective and the cosmos. But it is in the Vedas where the science of mathematical and structural harmony and cosmic influences has reached the highest practical level as applied to the built environment.

"Our houses, our buildings, our cities are the intermediaries between us and the cosmos, the natural universe," says Lipman. "Man-made environments affect quality of life and create predicted influences on the lives of the people who live in and use our buildings."

Lipman points out that some of the great Renaissance architects used proportion, as created by sacred geometry based in the mathematical spiraling Fibonacci series, as did the more modern Le Corbusier. He says today architects recognize that some buildings have great and inspiring influences that affect the success, health and wellbeing of the people who live and work in them, and that other buildings have the opposite effect. But except for being taught abstract geometric analysis, they're not taught why the structure has an impact. Worse, the importance of using the principles to consciously create a harmonious environment is completely disregarded.

"If you hire an architect to design a house," says Lipman, "you should be able to say to them, 'Mr. Architect, you've been designing houses for 20 years. Will you give me the statistics on the health and success of the families who've lived in your houses?' But we don't think to ask these questions. And architects don't think to keep statistics, because the assumption is that we don't know what the rules are, so it's all completely hit and miss. And that's a pretty terrible state of affairs. It would be intolerable in most disciplines."

According to Sthapatya Ved, the three most important influences of a building on human life are the influences of orientation, which is the direction something faces; placement within a building or a city, where certain activities take place; and proportion. There are ideal directions in which to cook, sleep, study, pray or meditate, and create. For example an Eastern orientation is preferred for the placement of bedrooms, because the first rays of the sun's light in the morning are the most "awakening" on the planet. Throughout the course of the day, the qualities of sunlight change – from the gentle clarity of the morning sun, to the overhead glare of mid-day, to the heating, penetrating rays of the western sun. Rooms and activities are oriented to take advantage of the appropriate qualities of sunlight as they change.

Although direct scientific research supporting Vedic architectural principles is scarce, there is some. For example, cells in rat's hippocampal formations are

known to discharge as a function of the animal's head direction in the horizontal plane. Recent studies now indicate that migratory birds may actually "see" Earth's magnetic lines of force, processing the information through the thalamus to orient themselves appropriately. In humans, orientation tuning and other visual functional-response properties of organisms are controlled by the thalamus, which also plays a major role in regulating arousal, the level of awareness and activity.

"The neurons in the thalamus operate at different intensities depending upon which directions we are facing," says Lipman. "If we turn away from a direction, certain neurons in the thalamus fire more weakly and can cease entirely."

Most interesting is the results of a study done at a hospital in Italy. A group of scientists lead by F. Benedetti published "Morning sunlight reduces length of hospitalization in bipolar depression" in a scientific, peer-reviewed journal in 2001. In this study, bipolar inpatients were housed in two sides of a hospital wing, one east-facing, the other west-facing. All other elements of the patients' environment, food, schedule, staff, furniture, cleaning products, etc, were identical. Patients "in E rooms (exposed to direct sunlight in the morning) had a mean 3.67-day shorter hospital stay than patients in W rooms," writes Benedetti.

There are many factors at work in the creation of a building aligned with principles of Vastu Science, and their importance is slowly making inroads in the West. Feng shui, a derivative of Sthapatya Ved, is probably the best known similar building methodology currently used in the U.S. With the increase in interest, some architects are going to the source.

Michael Borden, AIA, was so intrigued by the potentials that he went to India and studied under Vastu architect Ganapati Sthapati, whose direct lineage built the great temple at Tanjore in the 10th century. Borden explains there are many ancient texts with thousands of pages that dictate in detail the design necessities of buildings in general as well as specifics. "In one text, the Mayamata," says Borden, "some of the chapter headings are as follows: Dwelling sites, Examination of the Site, Taking possession of the Site, System of measurements, Orientation, Offerings, Towns, Number of Stories and the Dimensions, The Foundation Deposit, The Base, Dimensions of Pillars and Choice of Materials, Entablature, Joinery.

"My experience was that to digest, assimilate and apply the information in these texts was a discouraging chore. I began studies with Ganapati Sthapati hoping that he would act as an interpreter and filter of the knowledge for me and this he did. I came away from my studies with a

balanced and applicable body of knowledge."

Although not familiar with the Maharishi Sthapatya Ved system, the basic principles Borden was taught, outlined on his website vastu-design.com [1]align with Lipman's. Both architects also stress the importance of laying out a building according to an earth energy grid, siting a residence in alignment with the owner's birth time, the specific placement of entry doors, and the necessity of a Brahmastan, or central courtyard.

"It is the energy heart of the house," says Borden. "It is the lung of the house. This part of the house should always be left open and free of obstructing elements (pillars or walls) and mechanical services. It is best if this portion, at least, is directly in contact with the Earth. It is traditional, where climate permits, to leave the Brahmastan open to the sky so that the energetic space surrounding the Earth is attracted into the house."

Where heaven and earth meet

The vastu home, as reflected through the intentional creation of the central Brahmastan, is the place where heaven and earth meet. There are no particular styles or building materials required. While Vastu architecture traditionally builds with a 10,000 year life-span in mind, and stone and marble are often seen as preferential, Vastu houses and commercial structures can be as traditional looking as needed. However, whether modern, colonial, Craftsman, or western ranch-style they all have a beauty and a "feel" about them that is distinct and noticeable.

"People who have subtle perceptions of these sorts of things have very clear experiences when they come into these houses of a certain kind of coherence," says Lipman. "Using the laws of nature ... we can create predicted influences on the lives of the people who live in and use our buildings. And this is real, and it is measurable, and this is palpable and once you've tasted it yourself, if you have enough compassion you want everyone in the world to have it."

As far as advice to people who are interested in applying Vedic principles to their current environments, Lipman recommends three things: 1) acknowledge that the environments we spend time in have a very real influence on us and be aware of that. 2) Gather information about what will be most beneficial, and act on the information. "If you're going to spend 90% of your time in buildings, which we do, be sure it's an East or North facing building. And if you live in a house and it's not east or north facing, see what you can do to close up the south or west doors and use east or north doors. Sleep with your head to the east or the south. Do these two

things and don't take my word for it, see what your experience is."

And number three? Approach architecture as a totally integrated system and reap the benefits. "I can only hope that one day all of your readers are living in Vedic buildings," he says.

For more information vedicarchitecture.org [2]; for more information about the Marharishi Vastu programs maharishi-india.org/programmes/p4sthap.html [3] For info on the Maharishi Vedic City, Iowa, incorporated on July 21, 2001, as a model of ideal city life see maharishivediccity.net [4]

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