

VASTU: Creating Your Own Sacred Space

Offering insights into our relationship with the five elements, the ancient science of Vastu provides useful guidelines in creating the sacred space that fosters the flow of life force

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Have you ever visited a home where you felt a deep sense of harmony or on the flip side, the energy didn't feel quite right? Of course, there are many reasons why we may feel a particular way in different places; however, if we consider the various dynamics of physical space, we learn that space, just like people, has an energy that contributes to a felt-sense of harmony or not. There is a science that dates back thousands of years that looks at how to

design and build a space so to align it with nature and foster the flow of life force. It would be natural to assume that this science is the popular Chinese system called Feng Shui; however, what you may not know is there is a sister science called Vastu Shastra, which originates from India.

Vedic knowledge was brought to the Indus Valley Civilisation by the Aryans, who orally passed volumes of knowledge from generation to generation until it

was finally written with the advent of the Sanskrit script. When the semi-nomadic Aryans began to settle into an agrarian way of life, the fourth book of the Vedas was written – the *Atharvaveda*. Vastu Shastra was developed between 6000 and 3000 BCE according to archeological findings; however, it is believed that the Science of Architecture was formally written into *Sthapatya Veda* – a part of *Atharvaveda* about 3,000 years ago.

Derived from the Sanskrit root vas,



MODERN INTERIOR OF A DRAWING ROOM/THINKSTOCK



which means 'to reside', Vastu Shastra can be roughly translated to mean 'dwelling doctrine'. The Vastu Shastra manuals included chapters on home construction, town planning, and how villages, towns and kingdoms could efficiently integrate temples, water bodies and gardens within them to achieve harmony with nature.

The science of Vastu may at first seem irrelevant and esoteric, but if we consider the sister Vedic sciences of yoga and Ayurveda and our overall desire to live healthy and happy, things become much clearer. If we wish to grow spiritually, we practise yoga. If we wish to be healthy and vital in our physical body and mind, we use the wisdom of Ayurveda. If we wish to reap the benefits that yoga and Ayurveda provide, then it also makes perfect sense that we seek to dwell in spaces that are also harmonious with nature and that support our life ambitions.

Vastu Shastra talks the language of myth and symbols. According to legend, a gigantic demon called Vastu Purusha arose from a drop of Shiva's sweat and ravaged the world by blocking out the entire sky. Desperate to end this tyranny, Brahma (The Creator) called the gods together, and they agreed to work collectively to pin him down in order to save the world from his chaos. With Brahma occupying the centre, each of the 45 gods took a specific seat or *pada* in peripheral squares according to their importance.

This story tells the creation of the Vastu Purusha Mandala – a cosmic diagram

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of the subjugated Purusha lying with his head at the northeast corner, feet at the southwest and stomach towards the earth. While the mandala has served to guide architects and builders in India for thousands of years in the creation of magnificent Hindu temples in India and beyond, the Vastu Purusha is believed to occupy every construction whether it's a home, commercial office, garden or pond.

A total of 45 deities occupy the most commonly used Manduka (64 squares) or Paramasaayika (81 squares) seats that make up the Purusha Mandala. While Brahma is always at the centre, the space occupied by the gods varies in different mandalas. It is said that beneath the mandala's central square(s) is the space for the formless, shapeless, all-pervasive and all-connecting Universal Spirit, the self, representing universal essence.

Vastu considers the interplay and

alignment between our man-made environment and the forces of nature described as the five basic elements: earth, water, air, fire and space. The ancients believed the human body is a miniature reflection of the cosmos, and therefore we must maintain the invisible but constant relationship between the five elements outside and within an individual. Vastu designs are intended to integrate architecture with nature, the relative functions of various areas of the structure, and ancient beliefs utilising geometric patterns and symmetry.

Like many ancient traditions, the science of Vastu has faced its fair share of scepticism. During India's colonial era, many came to view the science as superstitious and esoteric. Thankfully, the knowledge of creating sacred space has been kept alive for thousands of years by temple architects and builders, who applied the ancient Vastu principles to the design and layout of everything from temples to houses, towns, cities, gardens, roads, water works, shops and other public areas. Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier incorporated modern architecture theories with those of Vastu in his design of the city of Chandigarh in India. The UNESCO World Heritage Site Angkor Wat in Cambodia is one of the world's largest Hindu temples and depicts the same grid structure as described in the ancient Vastu Shastras.

From a purely architectural standpoint, the principles of Vastu are based on becoming one with nature and offer very

rational design guidelines for space, sunlight, flow and function. According to Mumbai-based sustainable architect and designer Vistasp Meeta, “Vastu rules are excellent as guidelines for designing spaces that are private, comfortable, low-energy, as well as for maximising the usage of space and material”. That is, spaces that are built based on the science of Vastu not only foster our connection with nature, but are also good for nature by being naturally 'green' and sustainable. From a spiritual perspective, when a building or space is designed and constructed according to Vastu principles, we find cosmic energy bathes the space so that it is able to receive and transmit beneficial energies.

Interestingly, architects today would not be at odds with Vastu, since purposeful and effective architecture takes into account various climatic considerations (the five elements) in the design and building of structures and landscapes.

EARTH

Vastu considers the position, shape and slope of the land to ensure the building is structurally safe and properly aligned with planetary forces, magnetic poles and energy fields, since they all affect whether the vibration of the house will be nourishing or draining to the occupants.

WATER

Water makes up more than 80 per cent of our body and two thirds of the earth's



The Vastu Purusha Mandala

surface. Vastu offers important guidelines about the placement of water sources, as well as how to optimise protection from rain, gathering and conservation of water.

FIRE

The sun is a great source of energy and light. Vastu considers the landscape, orientation of the building and room placement depending on their purpose to ensure comfort all year.

AIR

Vastu recommends proper placement of doors, windows, ventilators, balconies, height of structure, as well as trees and plants for creating ventilation and flow within the structure.

SPACE

Vastu gives the element of space or ether importance as a natural element, and

it is related to the centre of a building space like an inner courtyard. Called the *brahmasthan*, it is important to keep this area open, clear and light.

It stands to reason that because many home buyers are not in a position to design and build a home from the ground up, it is likely that in recent times the principles of Vastu have gone indoors in order to facilitate the harmony and energetic flow within existing structures. These days, Vastu consultants and designers can be found applying the principles to interior spaces in order to bring spirit into physical manifestation through the dynamics of space, alignment and form. This evolution in Vastu science offers incredible flexibility to the design of interior home and workspaces, however not all are convinced by claims that Vastu will reward them with increased wealth, health, happiness and prosperity. No matter what you believe, when we organise our space with intention and in accordance with the laws of nature, our ability to bring flow into our lives is not as outrageous as it might seem.

If you are considering buying land or a dwelling, Vastu provides useful insights into our relationship with the five elements, nature and life force so we can maximise the benefits in the spaces we create. To understand the complex dynamics of individual, terrestrial, and celestial energetic systems is to ultimately support our ability to flourish in our relationship with ourselves. 🌿

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