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Vastu The 'Yogic Design' Explained

Words: John Dudley

When we start to practise yoga, we soon become aware of the many physical benefits it brings us. After a while, many people also report more subtle benefits, such as a growing sense of 'expanded awareness'. This broader perception makes us more aware of the people we interact with, our immediate surroundings and the wider environment too. As a result, many of us try and create the ideal space in which to practise our yoga – one that brings a sense of calm and tranquillity just by being there. Imagine then the benefits if we could create the ideal living space for our entire home and not just for our yoga room. The yoga-related, ancient science of Vastu makes this goal a practical, living possibility in our modern world.

Vastu, sometimes also called 'Yogic Design', is the design of life supporting, stress-free living spaces. These special spaces themselves create a feeling of peace and harmony in the occupants. Unlike many modern buildings which give us 'sick building syndrome', homes and offices constructed to Vastu principles give us 'well building syndrome'. Vastu therefore creates harmonious and uplifting living spaces that support our health and well-being.

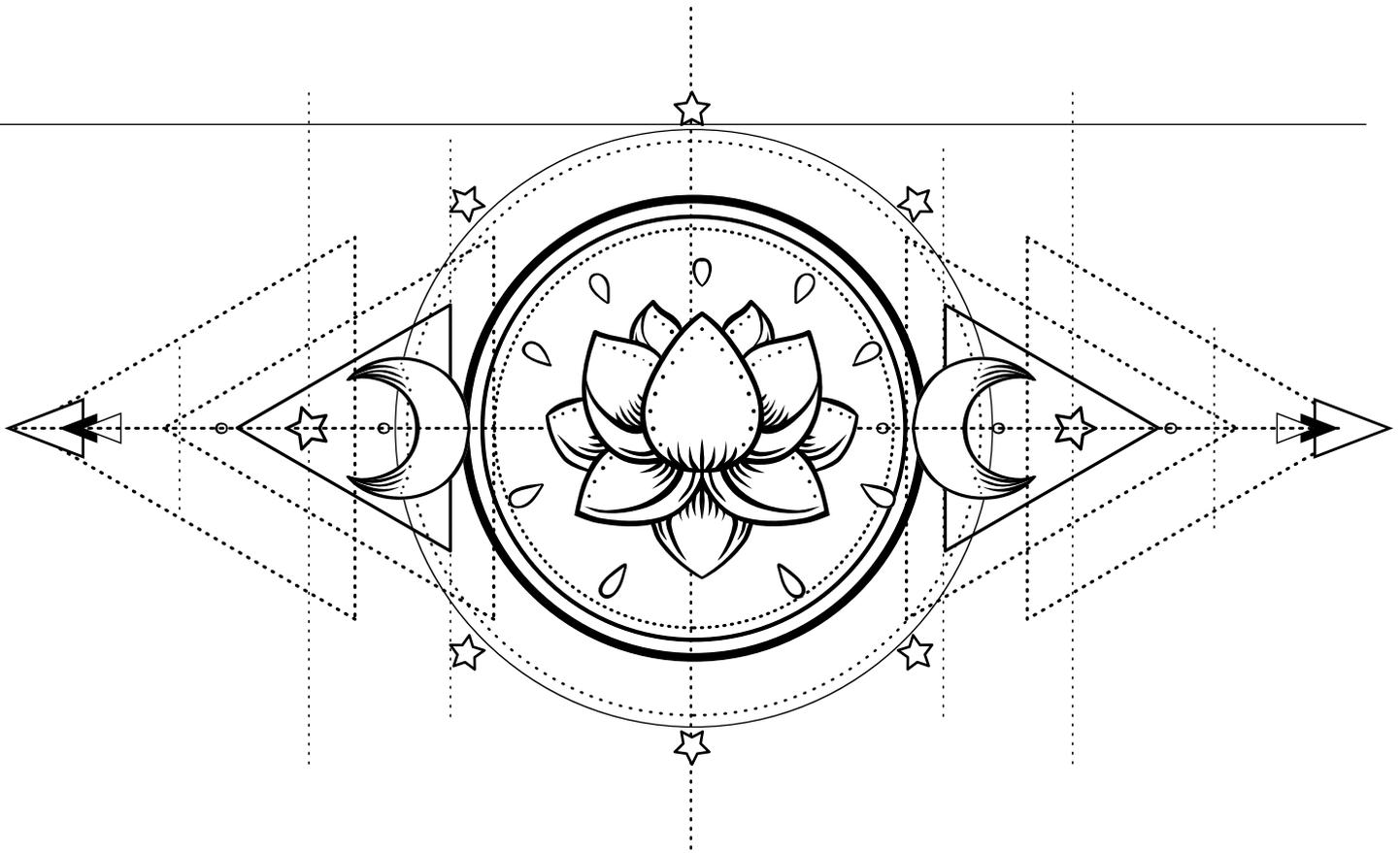
The ancient masons who crafted the medieval cathedrals of Europe realised that the geometry, alignment and layout of buildings had a profound effect on the occupants. Their aim was to create sacred spaces where the building itself brought

the occupants closer to the divine. The ancient knowledge of Vastu, from the same Vedic tradition as yoga, has been with mankind for thousands of years - as long as the knowledge of yoga itself. Its practical usefulness has withstood the long test of time.

Benefits of Vastu

People who live and work in homes and offices designed according to Vastu principles report feeling happier, healthier and less stressed. They also comment on feeling a deeper sense of self-awareness and inner peace. Families often say they experience fewer arguments and improved relationships too! A building designed to Vastu principles creates ideal living and working spaces. As a result, it also creates wellness in its occupants.

A self-realised Vedic master, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who brought meditation techniques from the Himalayas to the West in the 1960s, placed great emphasis on Vastu. He said that many of the problems we encountered in life were not actually due to our returning negative karmas, but were actually the result of living in buildings with poor Vastu. So, incorporating Vastu principles into our homes and offices can remove major obstacles to our progress in life. It can also make a big difference to our 'feel good' factor and energy throughout the day.



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Links to Feng Shui

Many of us have heard of the Chinese system of design called 'Feng Shui'. Although both Vastu and Feng Shui aim to create harmony in the built environment, they are completely different systems from different traditions. Vastu predates Feng Shui, which was almost certainly derived from it as knowledge of Vastu spread from India to China. This happened long before recorded history. Many people who practise yoga find Vastu resonates more with their inner feelings of harmony and transcendence simply because it originates from the same Vedic tradition as yoga itself.

Vastu Principles

At its most fundamental level, Vastu deals with the forces of nature, so homes and buildings designed to Vastu principles are 'in tune with all the laws of nature'. According to the Vedic tradition, these principles link the occupant's consciousness with the natural, universal order in which the whole universe and all the people in it are seen as an interconnected whole. Vastu designers set out to create life enhancing buildings that are in

harmony with the environment and the natural forces such as the energies from the sun, the earth and all the elements.

Although Vastu has its origins in the ancient Vedic texts of the Indian subcontinent, its universal rules and principles are appropriate to all of us, wherever we may live. Just like yoga, Vastu is not a belief system but a practical, systematic science. It comprises a set of principles for the optimum orientation, layout and proportion of buildings. Some examples are:

- ➔ Vastu favours East facing main entrances to our homes and tells us to avoid South facing ones.
- ➔ Certain room functions are allocated to specific directions - such as having a yoga room in the North-East corner, a kitchen in the South-East, a home office in the North, avoiding placing toilets in the North-East.
- ➔ Vastu homes feature a quiet, central area (called a 'Brahmasthan') where no activity takes place
- ➔ Vastu also recommends the best

directions for obtaining restful, refreshing sleep – with our head pointing towards South or East.

Vastu uses true North (direction towards the geographic North pole), not magnetic North (direction in which a magnetic compass needle points) for its orientation reference point. Most compass apps on our phones can be easily set to show the direction of true North.

“Vastu, sometimes also called ‘Yogic Design’, is the design of life supporting, stress-free living spaces.”

Vastu also suggests a range of 'environmental factors' which we should consider when buying or building a new home. The aim is to maximise the positive (and minimise the negative) influences of the laws of nature in the surroundings. Modern Vastu experts recommend avoiding a home with close proximity (within a distance of one mile) to hospitals, large cemeteries or crematoria, prisons, meat processing plants, heavy industries, very high voltage electrical supplies, power-stations, factory farms, etc. On the positive side, Vastu gives us rules for the best orientation and layout of our plot and the optimum placement of our home within it.

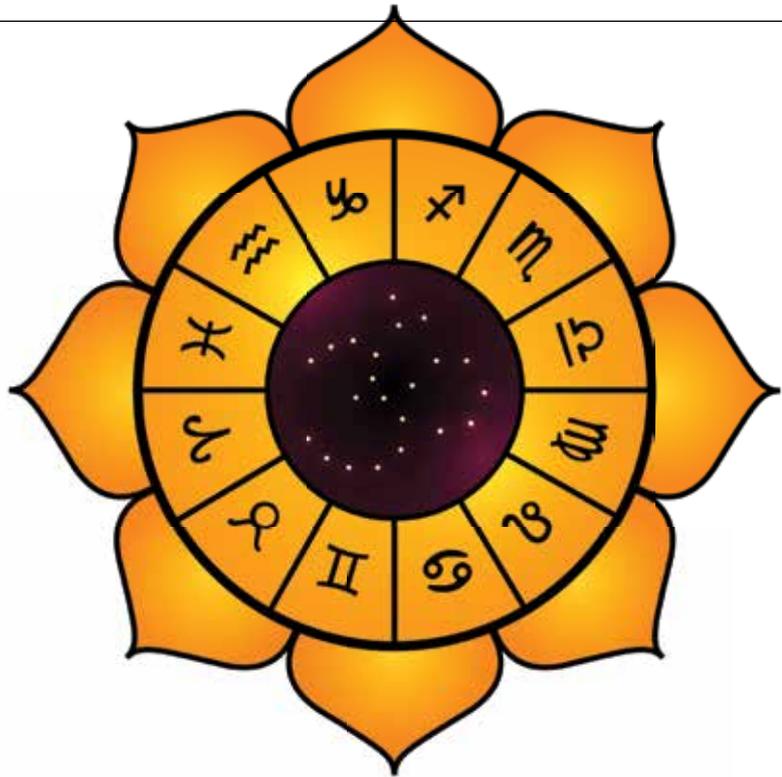
There are also links between Vastu and Vedic Astrology (Jyotish) in that the design of a building can be fine-tuned to take into account the astrological birth-charts of the occupants. In addition, Jyotish Astrology is also used to determine the most auspicious time and date on which to start construction work on a new house. As they say, 'well begun is half done'!

People often suggest that houses built to the same Vastu formulae would all look identical. In practise, houses built according to Vastu principles look completely different because both the local materials used in their construction and the occupant's requirements all differ. So, Vastu designed houses in Australia look very different from those built in the mid-west of the USA, which again look very different from the brick-built Vastu homes in an English village (Rendlesham, Suffolk). However, all Vastu homes have clearly identifiable common elements such as a quiet area or Brahmasthan at the centre, East facing main entrances (North is also acceptable), windows of a certain proportion, perimeter fences to define the plot, and room functions allocated to preferred directions, etc.

Many people are surprised to find that the principles of Vastu are not just limited to domestic dwellings. They can be applied to all buildings ranging from houses, offices, commercial premises and civic buildings to places of worship. These geometrical principles can even be used for the planning and optimum layout of whole towns and garden cities too.

Improving Positivity in Our Homes

In perfect alignment of our homes, room allocation according to preferred directions and good environmental factors are simply not possible. Vastu experts suggest a range of 'mitigating strategies' to make our environment



more positive, harmonious and life supporting. Many of us already do this to a certain extent with our yoga rooms. For example, we burn incense or bring in fresh flowers or put living plants there. We can extend this practice to our whole house and impose a sense of calm and 'settled order' on the place where we live.

We can also do some sort of spiritual practice in our home to improve the ambience. In addition to our yoga, this could be meditation, devotional singing or chanting *mantras*. Vedic *mantras* are particularly effective at increasing positivity – if we can't chant them ourselves, we can at least play them on our sound systems. There are many highly effective Vedic *mantras* on YouTube. The 'Om Namah Shivaya' and 'Mrityunjaya' mantras are particularly good at creating harmony and removing negativity. So, if a perfect Vastu is not within our reach, there are plenty of other 'yogic' things we can do to improve our environment and make it a more uplifting space.

Origins of Vastu

Vastu is one of the 'sister subjects' of yoga and dates back many thousands

of years. Historians suggest it dates from at least 3000 BCE, but Vedic scholars suggest even further back. A number of enlightened masters of the past were responsible for collating the knowledge of Vastu into the subject we know today.

Vastu, together with Yoga, Ayurveda and Jyotish, forms part of a powerful, synergistic group of ancient applied sciences designed to deliver both individual and universal benefits. Used together, their practical application really can make a tremendous difference to our overall wellbeing, health and happiness. Although this is ancient Vedic wisdom, many of us are now finding it particularly relevant to our modern, busy and stress-filled world.

John Dudley is the editor of the vedicplanet.com website which explains the yoga-related Vedic Sciences of Jyotish, Ayurveda and Vastu. He has practised yoga and meditation for over 40 years and has lived at an Ashram in India.

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