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[Architecture](#)
[Personal Space](#)

INSIDE

[From the Editor](#)
[Entryway](#)
[My Hudson Valley](#)
[Site Specific](#)
[Area Spotlight](#)
[Special Section](#)
[Home Style](#)
[House Horoscopes](#)
[Back Porch](#)

RESOURCES

[Real Estate Listings](#)
[Business Directory](#)

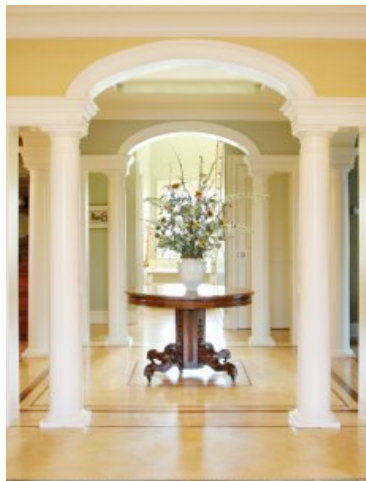


ENLIGHTENED DESIGN
Vedic architecture employs ancient design principles to promote peace and well-being.

BY SUSAN HODARA, PHOTOS BY LINDA BELL HALL

In the four years that Terry and Bernard Nevas have lived in their Weston, Conn., home, their lives, they will tell you, have never been better. Their sleep is refreshing, their meals are nourishing, their work is productive. Though their two children are grown, Ms. Nevas says she feels "a deepening richness of experience within our family." As for their 30-year marriage, Mr. Nevas says, "We had a perfect marriage before we moved into our vastu, and now it is even more perfect."

The Nevases' vastu is their airy, sun-filled, 4,200-square-foot home situated at the top of a winding, tree-lined driveway. "Vastu" is the Indian word for a structure built according to the ancient architectural principles known as Sthapathya Ved—one of 40 Vedic bodies of knowledge dating back to 2500 B.C. and addressing a range of topics from the arts to the sciences. Sthapathya Ved, which some say lent concepts to the Chinese feng shui, dictates the precise layout, orientation, and dimensions—down to 1/16 of an inch—for a building that is aligned most closely with the laws of nature, and thereby maximizes the well-being of its inhabitants.



Currently in the planning stages is the first Sthapathya Ved home in New York. The house will be built on four acres in Bedford Hills by Elizabeth and Hollis Taggart, who are currently renting in Bedford, and who have constructed two other Sthapathya Ved homes, one in Boone, N.C., and one on Kiawah Island, S.C. What convinced them to build a Sthapathya Ved house here, says Ms. Taggart, a writer, was their seven-year-old son, Lincoln. "After we'd been in our rental for seven months, he told me, 'I love this house, but I don't feel as protected here,' she says. "That was last February. We started looking for land in March."

Terry and Bernard Nevas learned of Sthapathya Ved through their over 30 years of meditation and involvement with Transcendental Meditation. They are the directors of the Maharishi Enlightenment Center of Mid-Fairfield County, currently located in their home, where they teach meditation. They built their house in collaboration with Neil Hauck, of Neil Hauck Architects, LLC, in Darien, Conn., and a Sthapathya Ved architectural consultant in Iowa responsible for ensuring that the design conformed to Vedic principles.

Sthapathya Ved buildings have been constructed across the globe in an assortment of styles, including log cabins, Swiss chalets, and stone villas. The Taggart home, says Ms. Taggart, blends "the best of American architecture." The Nevas residence is a hybrid, says Hauck, of "colonial and Connecticut farmhouse with classical Italianate influences." But regardless of size, form, or location, all such homes have common elements.

One is a fence surrounding the structure; the Nevases' is white picket. "The vastu fence delineates an area around the house that is protected," says Mr. Nevas. "Its placement is determined mathematically."



The homeowners, directors of the Maharishi Enlightenment Center of Mid-Fairfield County, say of their home, "It all feels right."

Atop the house are five conical finials—kalashes, in Sanskrit—positioned where sections of the roof intersect. Their role, Mr. Nevas explains, is to connect the individual to the cosmos, and he adds, he and Ms. Nevas have experienced their power. While constructing another Sthapathya Ved home in North Carolina a decade ago, they made regular visits to monitor its progress. "At one point," Mr. Nevas says, "we arrived at night. It hadn't been long since our last visit, and not much had been done, but something was different. We felt peaceful and energized, but we didn't know why. The next morning, we saw that the kalash had been placed on the roof."

Another feature of a Vedic home is its Brahmasthan, the exact center, again measured mathematically and sized in proportion to the rest of the house. "The Brahmasthan is the center of lively silence that supports everything else in the house," says Ms. Nevas. Within the Nevases' Brahmasthan sits a table holding an ornate floral arrangement. The area surrounding it is demarcated by four floor-to-ceiling columns, and the Brahmasthan itself extends to the roof, where it is bordered by windows on all sides. "Nothing travels through the Brahmasthan," says Ms. Nevas. "It is a space that is unused."

The Nevases' front door is well used, however, because it faces east in what was determined to be the most auspicious place to enter the house. According to Vedic principles, the orientation of the entrance governs an array of influences. East, the most advantageous direction, promotes enlightenment and fulfillment, while south, the least desirable, brings destruction and loss. If an east-facing entryway is impossible, north is an acceptable alternative. Mr. Hauck notes that, although he would normally have centered the Nevases' door, Vedic calculations required that it be shifted off-center.



On a side table stands a portrait of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of transcendental meditation and the homeowners' teacher.

Continued
 1 | **2** | [Next »](#)

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