

Vaastu & Feng Shui - Similar Sciences or Worlds Apart?

Vaastu and Feng Shui originate from two vastly different cultural backgrounds and civilizations. The underlying basic principles of both however are purported to follow the laws of Nature; and both share some common approaches. The primary objective of both is ‘the creation of harmonious energy within dwellings to create a good feeling and to attract a good life’. Feng shui and Vaastu expert and consultant SB. S. Surendran, who runs a flourishing professional consultancy from Bangalore in South India, offers an introduction to Vaastu and explains some of the similarities with feng shui.

Vaastu is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘Place of Dwelling’. It originates from ‘The Vedas’, ancient Indian scriptures on which many of the esoteric sciences of India are based. Vaastu principles reflect the theories of Quantum Physics. It emphasizes that ‘everything vibrates and pulsates’. It also asserts the notion that ‘everything is interconnected’.

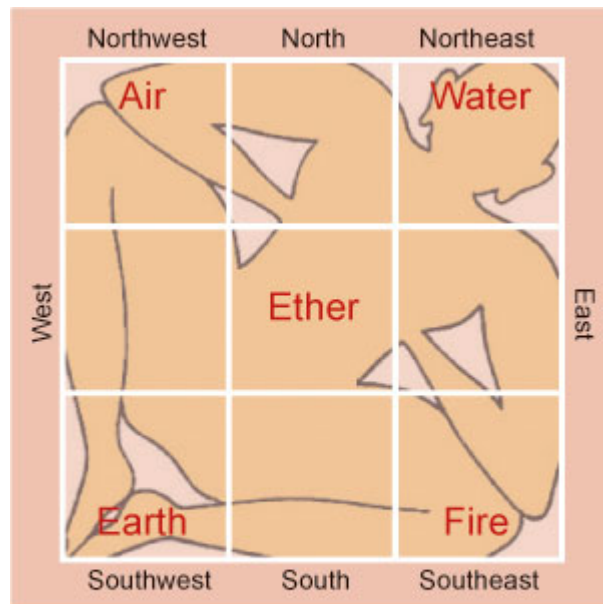
Vaastu was widely applied in the design and construction of ancient temples and architecture during early Indian civilizations and its influence continues to be prevalent in modern times. Followers of Vaastu view the Chinese practice of feng shui as a corollary of Vaastu. Both, they say, encompass the science of space alignment, positioning, planning and orientating structures and interiors; and both study the energies of the immediate environment and one’s ‘place of dwelling’ and analyze the impact it has on those residing within.

Universal energy: the Vaastu Purusha and the Chinese Dragon

In Vaastu, the universal energy within any property is depicted by a demon-faced man lying down with his hands and legs positioned within the four segments of the property. He signifies the underlying earth energies which can be harmful unless countered under certain circumstances or harnessed appropriately to bring good luck. This demon-faced man is known as Vaastu Purusha, ‘Purusha’ meaning Man in Sanskrit. In feng shui, similarly, the energy of the universe, known as ‘Chi’, is described as the dragon’s cosmic breath.

Flow of energy: the Terminals and the Yin and Yang

The earth as we know is tilted on its axis at 23.5 degrees; hence the geographic North (and magnetic Northeast) is exposed to maximum cosmic energy and absorption. This energy is also known as the bio-energy that flows from the Northeast to the Southwest. These then gets stretched towards the sides covering the Northwest and Southeast corners, all creating a magnetic field. The Northeast is where positive energy originates, so it is treated as the ‘Positive Terminal’ and the Southwest where the energy reaches is treated as the ‘Negative Terminal’. These two ‘terminals’ are similar to the concept of Yin and Yang in feng shui and it is also interesting that the NE/SW axis is also of great significance in feng shui. The difference between Vaastu and feng shui is that feng shui does not stop at the terminals. “Feng shui goes on to say that there are not one but TWO polarities, and therefore two axes: the NE/SW axis and the North/South axis. There is plenty that is said about these two directional axes in the science of feng shui and how they are used to design good feng shui,” explains Lillian Too, “One can also refer to them as two sets of terminals using the definition of Vaastu. So here there is a superficial similarity between the two practices.”



The vedic Square is similar to the Lo Shu Square in feng shui. But the 5 elements are different and placed differently within the square.

The Vedic Square and Eight Mansions

In Vaastu, a property is divided into 9 sectors and each of these sectors is energy specific and has significantly different meanings. These 9 sectors are further divided into 81 squares, known as 'Vedic Squares', denoting the spatial influence of the eight compass directions. These Vedic squares also denote the vulnerable energy points within a property and the positioning of rooms is carried out after analyzing the grid so that vulnerable points can be found and avoided. This particular formula of Vaastu bears some resemblance to feng shui's 'Eight Mansions' theory.

The Pancha Bhootas and the 5 Elements

Vaastu also has something similar to the five elements that is based on the 'Pancha Bhootas'; Pancha meaning Five and Bhootas meaning Elements. The elements of Vaastu however are different from the 5 elements of feng shui.

In Vaastu, the five elements are Air, Water, Earth, Ether (space or cosmos) and Fire. These elements also represent various sectors of a plot. Ether known as the 'Eshanya' which resides in the Northeast, Air known as 'Vayu' resides in the Northwest, Fire known as 'Agni' resides in the Southeast and is symbolically shown as a triangle. Water known as 'Jal' resides in the Northwest with Air. Earth represents the quality of form and is represented by a square and resides in the Southwest.

In addition to these elements, the four cardinal directions in Vaastu relate to other aspects of life. East represents children and prosperity and is known as 'Indira', West known as 'Varuna' relates to fate and Karma (Destiny), North known as 'Kubera' relates to career and South known as 'Yama' relates to legal affairs and the cycle of life and death. The centre of the plot is known as the 'Brahma Sthana', i.e. the place of the creator, which is the embodiment of creativity and balance.

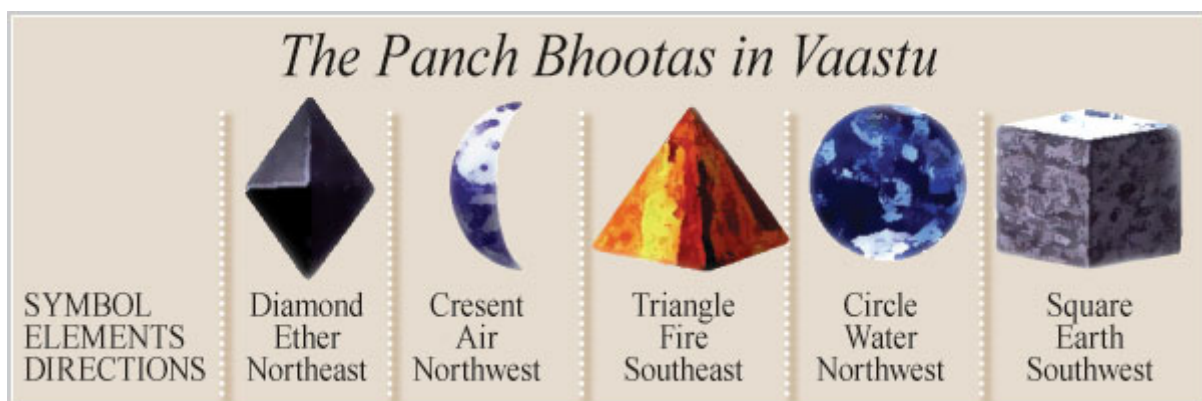
Different Schools

As with feng shui, there are different schools of theory for Vaastu. One basic theory relates to the orientation and positioning of rooms and doors on the basis of fixed directions, which is similar to the Pa Kua method of aspirations in feng shui. Another theory suggests that the Vaastu Purusha moves and rotates every three hours and also annually in a clockwise direction, resting for 3 months in each position; this takes into account the change in energies due to the passage of time. Besides this, the effect of seasons as well as the movement of the sun and the influence of the nine planetary positions also causes changes in a structure which then has to be updated.

In Vaastu, effective assessment of an individual's place of dwelling thus incorporates calculations based on identified afflictions of the specific stars due to yearly changes. This is exactly similar to the theory of Flying Star annual changes in feng shui, where annual afflictions are updated and corrected as standard feng shui practice.

In the most advanced school of Vaastu, the orientation of the main door, bed positions and also the time for renovation and structural changes are calculated on the basis of the occupant's birth details such as time of birth, place of birth and date of birth. These inputs ascertain the Birth Star known as 'Nakshatra' and the 'Rashi' (subset of the Birth Star) of the individual. This theory resembles the theory of Kua Numbers in feng shui.

In addition, as per Hindu astrology, there are 27 stars and the astrological dimensions of any individual can be represented in a chart with 12 sectors, which represents the zodiac or animal sign of the individual. This is reminiscent of feng shui astrology incorporating the animal signs of the Chinese zodiac. The advanced school of Vaastu requires a thorough knowledge of planetary movements, its influence on the different stars and how the planets impact the individual. This is then incorporated into Vaastu recommendations.



Practical Similarities

There are other subtle similarities between Vaastu and feng shui.

An example is the 'T-Junction'; in Vaastu, properties that face a T junction are considered harmful, especially if the road is piercing the main door or master bedroom resembling poison arrows. In India, these arrows are known as 'Veedhi shoolas', Veedhi meaning Road, and Shoolas meaning Spears. The 'T-Junction' property in feng shui is also considered extremely harmful.

Both practices also advocate that the North and East sectors benefit from water features and the Southwest sector with earth elements such as rocks. In both practices, obstructions to main doors caused by pillars, poles, trees, thorny plants and sap producing plants are considered harmful; square and rectangular properties are considered auspicious; properties close to graveyards and prisons are considered inauspicious; and having prayer rooms and toilets beneath staircases is considered inauspicious.

Practical Differences

Vaastu does not recommend the use of aquariums as this signifies life in captivity; but keeping fish in large ponds is acceptable. Secondly, in Vaastu, a kitchen in the Northwest sector is acceptable as this sector represents the element 'Air', but in feng shui it represents 'fire at heaven's gate' and is considered a taboo.

Vaastu does not consider the use of paintings or indoor plants as a total correction of defects in structures. Indeed, Vaastu demands structural changes. Feng shui on the other hand effectively uses paintings and indoor plants to counter defects and this is one factor considered highly advantageous over Vaastu. Feng shui maintains that 'what is not seen does not harm'.

Wealth, health and prosperity

In today's modern world, adaptation of Vaastu and feng shui to buildings, home décor and even gardens has gained immense popularity. Even though it is sometimes misinterpreted by some people as a religious practice and discarded by a few as 'superstitious belief', the popularity of both Vaastu and feng shui witnessed a huge revival ten years ago. Today, interest in these sciences of placement is growing by leaps and bounds across the world. Adapting these to localized environments has been the challenge of both feng shui and Vaastu practitioners.

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