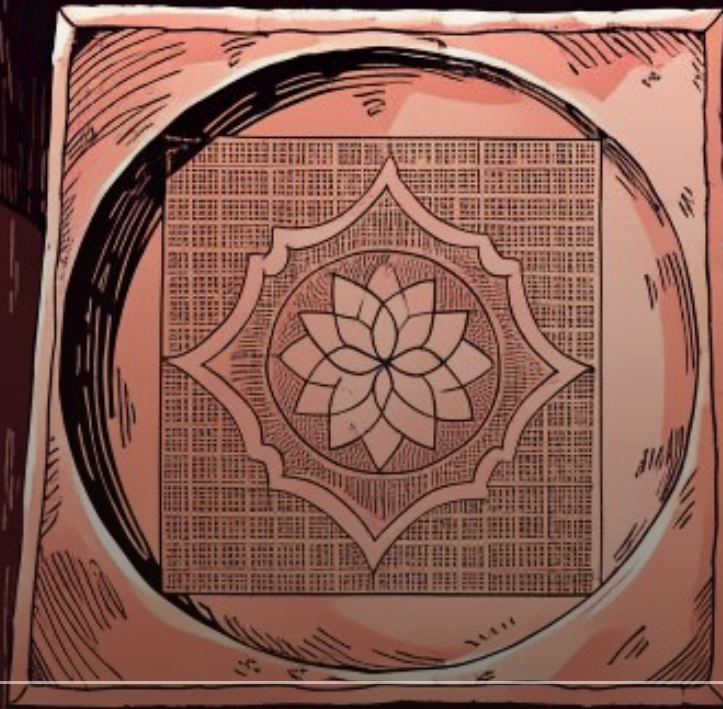


# The story of *Vastu*

The Vastu Purusha, the grid of forty-five gods and the principles for a home, with references to the old texts and modern studies.



01

## THE STORY

The being under every house

02

## THE GRID

81 squares, eight directions

03

## THE HOME

Principles, sun and good sense

# A story first, *then a plan.*

Many people meet Vastu as a list of rules: kitchen here, bedroom there. The rules make more sense once you know the story they grew from and the texts that wrote it down. This book tells the story, shows the grid, and then looks at the rules for a home with a designer's eye.

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|       |                                                                      |    |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 01    | <b>The story</b>                                                     | 03 |
|       | The Vastu Purusha, his fall, and where the idea comes from           |    |
| <hr/> |                                                                      |    |
| 02    | <b>The grid</b>                                                      | 07 |
|       | The 81-square diagram, the eight guardians, and the old site tests   |    |
| <hr/> |                                                                      |    |
| 03    | <b>The home</b>                                                      | 11 |
|       | The principles families follow, the sun behind them, and a checklist |    |

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The main factual pages name their sources at the foot, and our own advice and readings are marked as ours. Verse numbers are from the Brihat Samhita, the oldest dated text with a full chapter on house-building. Where texts disagree, or where a rule is modern practice and not scripture, the page says so. Vastu is a tradition, not a building code. No rule in it replaces your structural engineer, your local byelaws or a soil report.



CHAPTER 01

# The story

Before there was a grid, there was a being so large that he hid the earth and the sky. What the gods did with him is the first lesson of Vastu: the ground you build on is not empty.

# The being who *covered the sky*

Two old tellings survive. They agree on the ending: he lies under every building, and the gods still hold him there.



## AS VARAHAMIHIRA TELLS IT

The astronomer Varahamihira opens his chapter on house-building with it. A being appeared whose body was so vast that it concealed the earth and the sky. The gods caught hold of him, each by a different limb, and laid him down with his face to the ground. Each god stayed where he held, and presides over that part of the body. Brahma made this being, filled with the gods, the Vastu Purusha, the person of the site (vv. 2-3).

## AS THE PURANA TELLS IT

The Matsya Purana gives him a birth. While Shiva fought the demon Andhaka, sweat fell from his brow, and a fierce being sprang from the drops (ch. 252). Still hungry after drinking the blood shed in the battle, he performs austerities, and Shiva grants him the power to devour the three worlds. He falls to the earth and is pinned down by the gods and other beings.

*“a body so vast as to conceal  
the Earth and the sky”*

Brihat Samhita, chapter 53, verse 2, in the 1884 translation of N. Chidambaram Iyer

## WHY HE IS FED

Pinned, he asks how he is to live. He is granted a share of the offerings made to the site. This is the origin the Purana gives for the Vastu offering, the rite that appeases him. Many families perform it today when a building is begun or at a house-warming.

# A fall becomes *a floor plan*

Read the story again as a builder would. A wild thing is laid flat, squared, and given to forty-five keepers. Each keeper gets a place. That arrangement of places is the plan.

## 45

gods hold him down

Brahma at the centre with twelve around him, and thirty-two on the edge. vv. 42-50

## 81

squares in the house diagram

Nine by nine, drawn with ten lines each way. A 64-square version is given as the alternative. vv. 42, 55

## NE

where his head lies

Face to the ground, head in the north-east. v. 51

## 9

central squares for Brahma

The householder is told to take particular care of this part of the house and keep it clean. vv. 46-47, 66

## 0

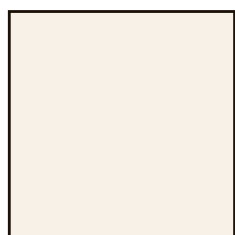
pillars on a vital point

The text marks vital points, marma, on the diagram and says no pillar should stand on them. v. 57

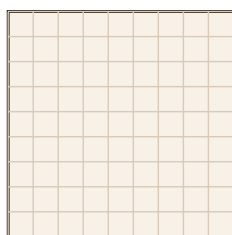
## 3

verses to the lord of the dwelling

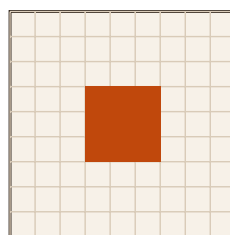
Rigveda 7.54 asks Vastospati for a happy entrance and a home free of disease, long before any grid was written down.



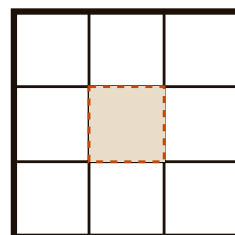
1 An open site



2 Squared to the directions



3 A keeper for every square



4 A house arranged around the cent

### WHAT THE STORY IS DOING

It gives the site a body. A house is then not a box dropped on blank land but something built on a living ground that deserves care: ask before you dig, keep the centre clean, do not drive a pillar through a vital point.

### HOW SCHOLARS READ IT

The art historian Stella Kramrisch read the same diagram, the Vastu Purusha mandala, as the key to the plan and symbolism of the Hindu temple. Scholars still debate how directly such diagrams governed real buildings.

# Where the ideas *come from*

Vastu is not one book. It is a line of texts written over many centuries, by astronomers, priests and master builders, and they do not always agree.

01

## Rigveda, hymn 7.54

The oldest layer of Sanskrit literature

A short prayer to Vastospati, guardian of the homestead. No grid and no rules yet, only the thought that a dwelling has a guardian.

7.54

book and hymn

02

## Brihat Samhita

Varahamihira, astronomer of Ujjain

An encyclopaedia of the sky, the weather and daily life. Its chapter on house-building gives the story, the 81-square diagram, door positions and site tests.

6th<sub>c.</sub>

century CE, chapter 53

03

## Matsya Purana

Compiled over a long period

Tells of the birth of the Vastu Purusha from the sweat of Shiva, and how the figure is to be drawn on the ground before building.

252

chapters 252-253

04

## Mayamata

A builder's manual from south India

Names thirty-two site diagrams, from Sakala with a single square, through Manduka with 64 and Paramasayika with 81, up to 1,024 squares.

32

diagrams; Dagens dates it  
9th to 12th century

05

## Samarangana Sutradhara

Attributed to King Bhoja of Dhar

A long verse treatise on towns, palaces, houses and temples from central India.

11th<sub>c.</sub>

century CE

06

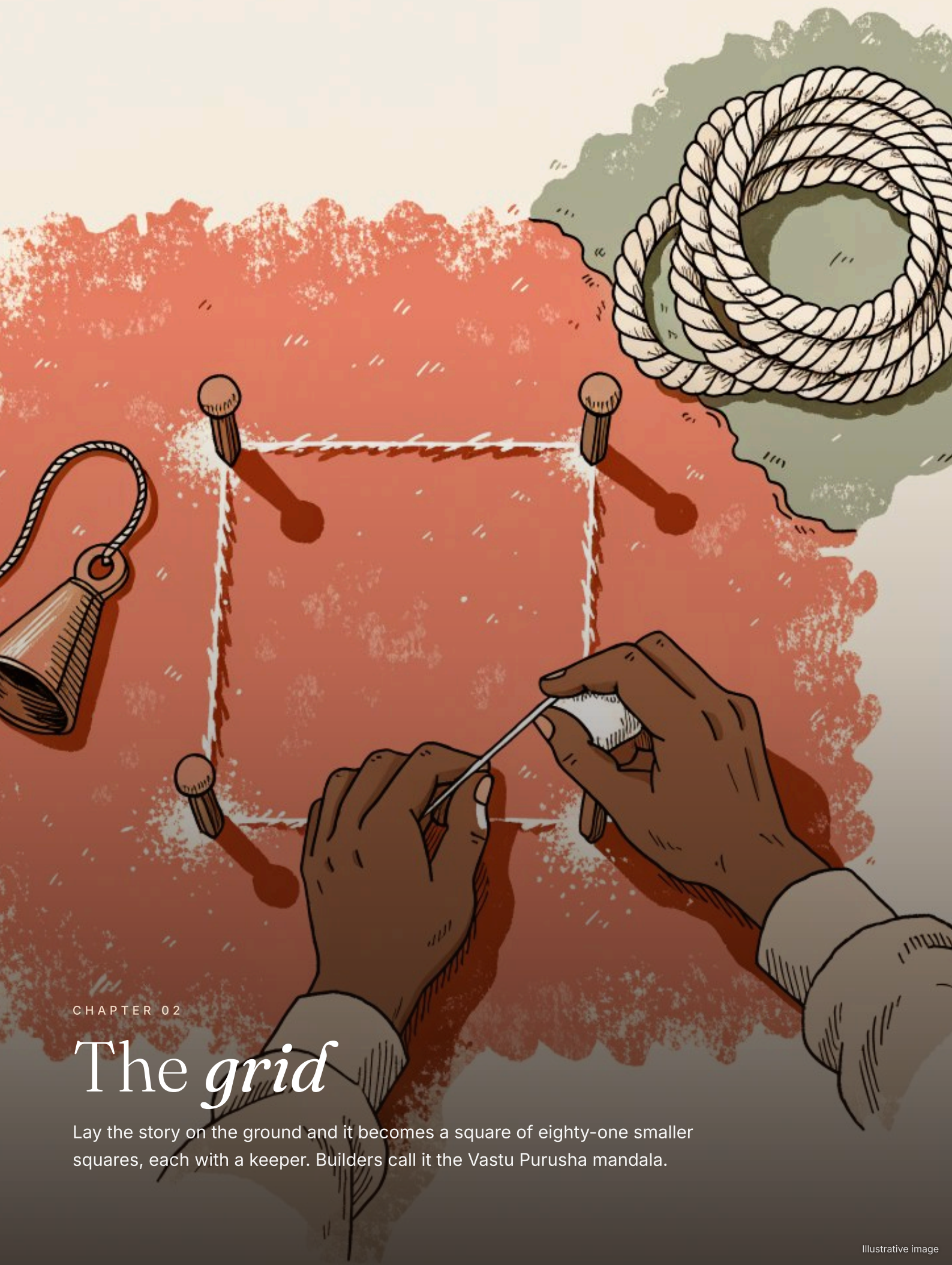
## Manasara

Widely studied through the editions of P. K. Acharya

Edited and translated by Acharya in the 1930s. Its date is disputed: he argued for an early one, while later scholars see the surviving text as a later compilation.

?

date disputed



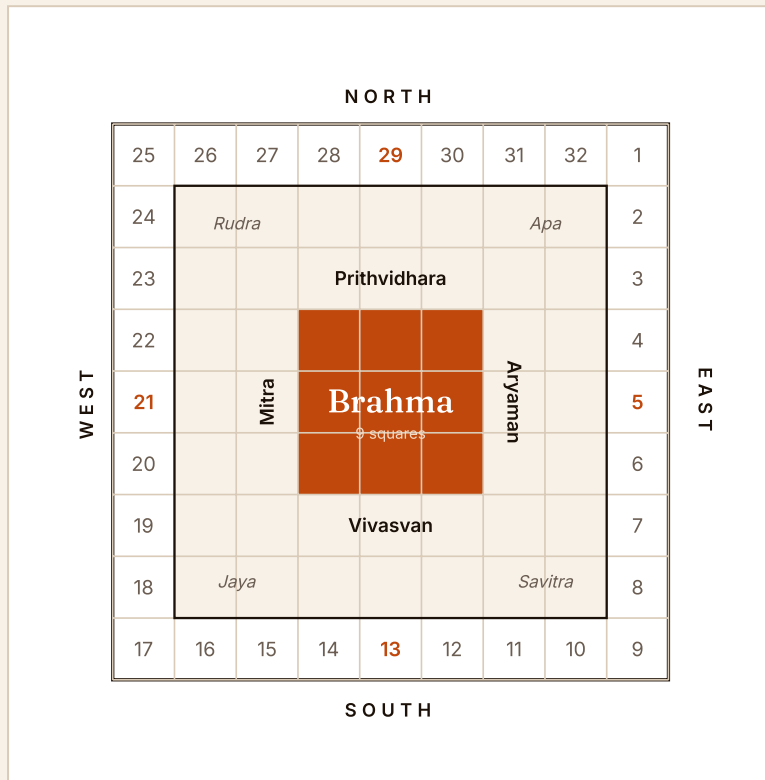
CHAPTER 02

# The *grid*

Lay the story on the ground and it becomes a square of eighty-one smaller squares, each with a keeper. Builders call it the Vastu Purusha mandala.

# 81 squares, 45 gods

This is the diagram the Brihat Samhita gives for a house. Brahma holds the middle. Twelve gods stand around him. Thirty-two keep the edge, one in each outer square.



## THE INNER RING

Aryaman stands east of Brahma, Vivasvan south, Mitra west and Prithvidhara north. The inner corners hold four pairs: Apa and Apavatsa in the north-east, Savita and Savitra in the south-east, Indra and Jaya in the south-west, Rajayakshma and Rudra in the north-west. How many squares each inner god holds differs between texts, so the band is drawn plain.

## OTHER DIAGRAMS

The same chapter gives a 64-square diagram as the alternative, with Brahma on four squares. The Mayamata, a later manual, names thirty-two diagrams in all.

## WHY IT MATTERS TO A PLAN

The text grades a door by the edge square it falls in, and asks the householder to take care of the place of Brahma at the centre. The room-by-room preferences of today come from later practice.

## THE THIRTY-TWO GODS OF THE EDGE, COUNTED FROM THE NORTH-EAST CORNER

### East, 1 to 8

Shikhi (fire), Parjanya, Jayanta, Indra, Surya, Satya, Bhrisha, Antariksha

### South, 9 to 16

Anila (wind), Pusha, Vitatha, Brihatkshata, Yama, Gandharva, Bhringaraja, Mriga

### West, 17 to 24

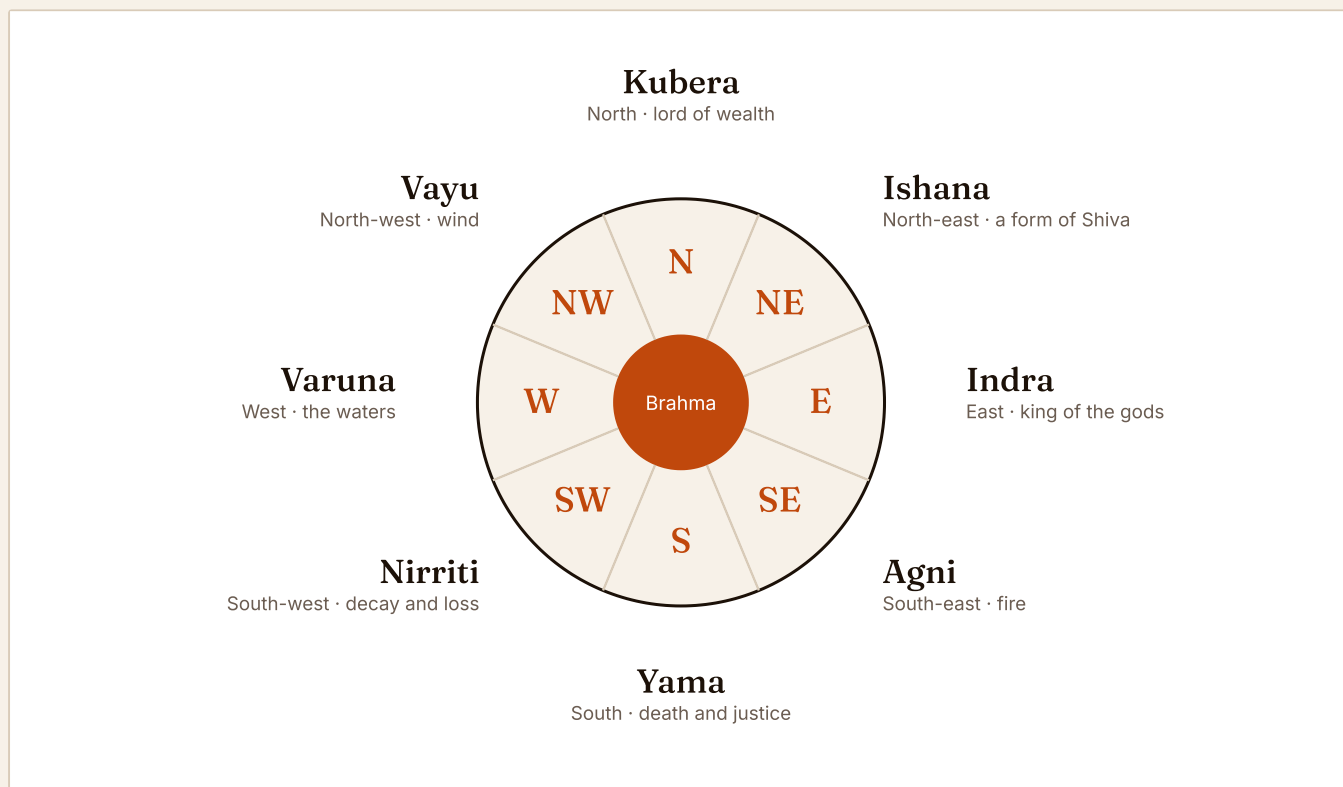
Pitri, Dauvarika, Sugriva, Kusumadanta, Varuna, Asura, Shosha, Papayakshma

### North, 25 to 32

Roga, Ahi, Mukhya, Bhallata, Soma, Bhujaga, Aditi, Diti

# Eight directions, *eight guardians*

A second, simpler map sits beside the grid: one guardian for each direction of the compass. Many household Vastu rules lean on this map.



## THE GUARDIANS

The eight are called the Ashta-Dikpalas, the keepers of the directions. They are carved on the outer walls of many temples, each on the side he guards.

A kitchen in the south-east is a kitchen in the corner of Agni, fire. A prayer room in the north-east sits with Ishana, where the head of the Vastu Purusha lies. Heavy, closed rooms go to the south-west, the corner of Nirriti.

## A COMMON ELEMENT CHART

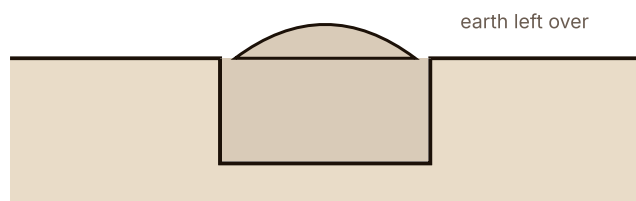
Many charts today add the five elements: water in the north-east, fire in the south-east, earth in the south-west, air in the north-west and space in the centre.

Fire and air match their guardians. Water does not: Varuna, lord of the waters, guards the west. The edge gods of the 81-square grid are a different list again. So this chart is not the same thing as the arrangements of gods in the old text.

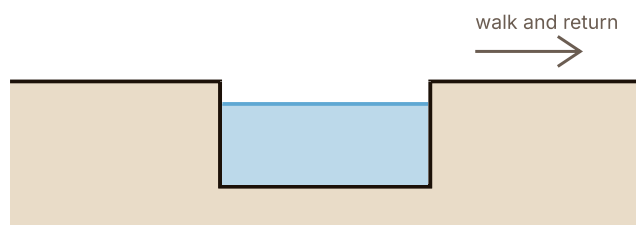
# Testing the ground, *the old way*

Before any drawing, the builder tested the site. Three of the tests in the Brihat Samhita need only a pit one cubit deep, dug in the middle of the plot.

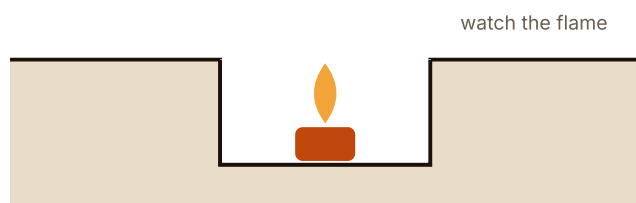
## 1 Dig, then fill it back



## 2 Fill it with water



## 3 Light a lamp in it



### 1. THE EARTH TEST

Dig the pit and fill it back with the same earth. If earth is left over, the site is good; if it only just fills, middling; if it falls short, poor (v. 92). Digging and refilling change how soil packs, so this test cannot tell you the bearing capacity of the ground or how much it will settle.

### 2. THE WATER TEST

Fill the pit with water, walk 100 feet away and come back, in the words of the 1884 translation. If the level has not dropped, the site is good (v. 93). Today we would call this a rough look at how fast the ground drains.

### 3. THE LAMP TEST

Burn a wick in an earthen vessel placed in the pit. The text reads the direction of the flame, like the colour, smell and grasses of the soil, as a sign of which of the four classes of its time the site suits (vv. 94-97). That belongs to its century, not to ours, and says nothing about foundation strength.

### WHAT TO DO TODAY

Keep the habit, change the tool. Before you design a foundation, get a soil investigation from a geotechnical engineer. Your structural engineer needs its numbers.



CHAPTER 03

# The *home*

Here are the principles many Indian families ask for, what tradition says about each, and what a designer sees when the sun is drawn over the same plan.

# The principles *families follow*

These are the placements taught in many Vastu handbooks today. Under each is a plain reading: what the rule does for the house, whatever you believe.

01

## Entrance

North or east is preferred; the old text grades all 32 edge squares as door positions.

*Reading:* east may get morning sun, north differs. Check the shading on your plot.

N, E  
favoured faces

02

## Kitchen

The corner of Agni, fire; north-west is the usual second choice. *Reading:* any kitchen needs daylight, ventilation and an exhaust to the outside.

SE  
south-east

03

## Main bedroom

The heaviest, most closed corner. *Reading:* west-facing walls take the afternoon sun, so shade them, and choose wall construction and insulation for your climate.

SW  
south-west

04

## Prayer room

The corner of Ishana, where the head of the Vastu Purusha lies. Kept light and clean. *Reading:* morning sun may reach this corner; allow for glare and heat.

NE  
north-east

05

## Water

Wells and underground tanks to the north-east, the overhead tank to the south-west. *Reading:* keep tanks clear of footings; design the frame for the tank load.

NE  
underground water

06

## Centre

The Brahmasthan, the seat of Brahma, is left open or lightly used. *Reading:* an open-to-sky courtyard with openings around it can bring daylight and air into a deep plan.

C  
kept open

07

## Toilets

North-west or west; never the north-east or the centre. *Reading:* present-day preferences, not a rule from the old texts cited here.

NW  
north-west, west

08

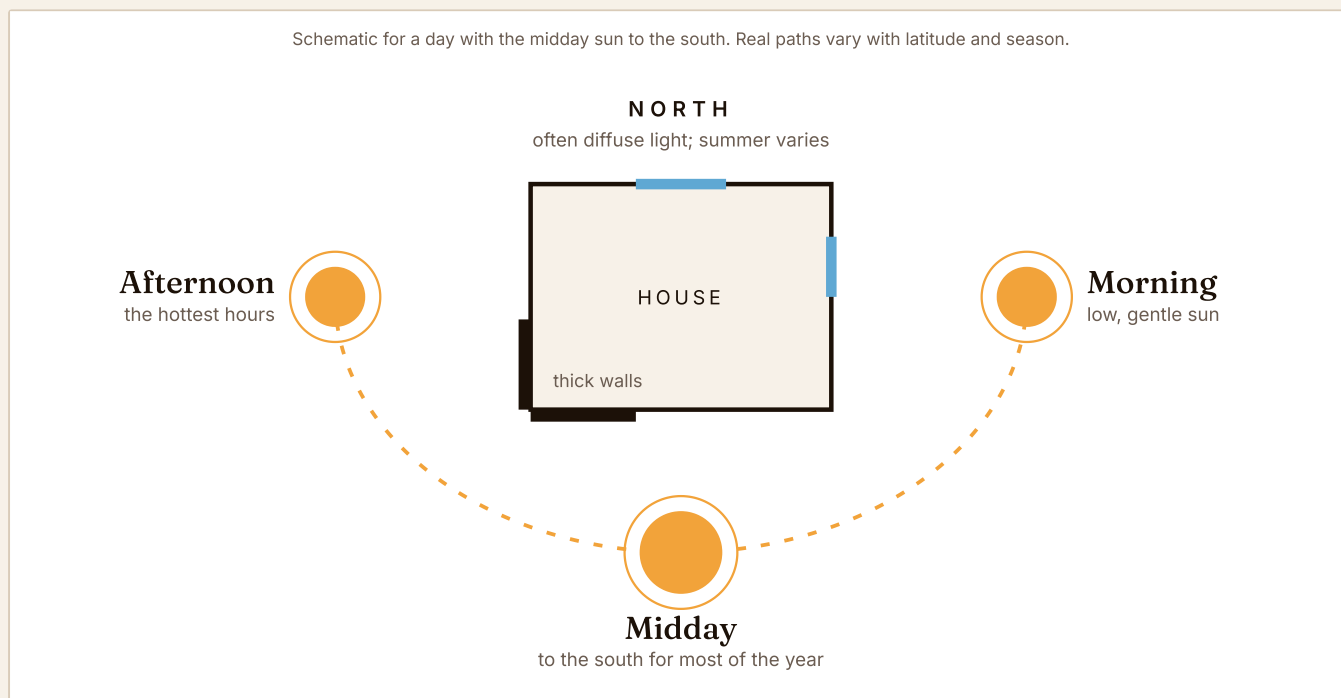
## Stairs

On the south, west or south-west side, rising clockwise. *Reading:* a staircase is a heavy block with few windows, a useful shield on the hot sides.

S, W  
south and west

# Tradition and *the sun*

Draw the sun over an Indian house and some Vastu habits start to look like climate sense. Not all of them do, and it depends on where you live.



## WHAT THE SUN EXPLAINS

The sun rises in the east. At midday it stands to the south for most of the year across India, though south of the Tropic of Cancer it can stand to the north in summer. North walls often get diffuse light but can take direct sun in summer. West walls take the sun in the hottest hours of the afternoon.

So some Vastu preferences can suit some climates and plots. Building science chooses orientation, shading, insulation and ventilation from local conditions; it does not prescribe one room plan for all of India.

## WHAT IT DOES NOT EXPLAIN

Small studies have looked at sleep and the direction of the bed, but none establishes that following a Vastu layout improves a family's health, wealth or luck. Those are matters of belief, and this book makes no such promise.

A good plan answers your plot first: its shape, its road, its neighbours, its breeze, your city's rules. When a Vastu preference fits, keep it. When it fights the plot, the structure or the law, it gives way. Vastu is a tradition, not a building code. No rule in it replaces your structural engineer, your local byelaws or a soil report.

# Using Vastu *well*

A short list to carry into the first meeting with your architect or engineer. Tick what you have done.

## BEFORE YOU BUY OR BUILD

- ☐ **Find true north**  
Ask your surveyor or architect to mark it. A compass shows magnetic north, which differs by a small local angle, and the road side of a plot is rarely exactly north, south, east or west.
- ☐ **Get the soil investigated**  
The pit tests are a tradition. The foundation needs an engineer's soil report.
- ☐ **Check the rules for the plot**  
Zoning, setbacks, height and parking decide the legal box you can build in.

## WHILE YOU PLAN

- ☐ **Tell your architect early**  
Say on day one which Vastu points matter to your family. Changing them after the columns are fixed costs money.
- ☐ **Rank them**  
Mark each one as a must or a wish. Some plots cannot meet every preference.
- ☐ **Let the plot decide the rest**  
Sun, breeze, view and privacy should place the rooms that tradition leaves open.

## LINES NO RULE MAY CROSS

- ☐ **Structure**  
Never move, cut or add a column, beam or wall for a remedy without your structural engineer.
- ☐ **Light and air**  
Every living room, bedroom and kitchen keeps its window and ventilation.
- ☐ **Law and safety**  
Setbacks, stair widths and exits stay as the byelaws require.

## BE CAREFUL OF

- ☐ **Fear**  
Anyone who says your family is in danger unless you pay or rebuild.
- ☐ **Demolition as a first answer**  
Breaking a sound house to follow a rule. Ask for another opinion first.
- ☐ **Promises**  
No layout can promise wealth, health or success.

# Keep the story, *check the plan.*

Vastu gives a family a way to talk about a house as a whole: its centre, its corners, its light. Keep that, and let engineering and law do their own work.

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## Check your own plan, free

NirmanDost has a free Vastu checker. Place your rooms on a grid and see how the plan reads, direction by direction. Find it at [nirmandost.in](http://nirmandost.in).

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## Good modern studies

Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (1946). Vibhuti Chakrabarti, *Indian Architectural Theory: Contemporary Uses of Vastu Vidya* (1998). P. K. Acharya, *Architecture of Manasara* (1933-34).

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## The texts behind this book

Brihat Samhita of Varahamihira, ch. 53, tr. N. Chidambaram Iyer (1884). Matsya Purana, ch. 252-257. Mayamata, tr. Bruno Dagens (1985). Rigveda 7.54, tr. R. T. H. Griffith (1896).

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## What this book is

A free guide to a tradition, with references for what the texts say and our own advice marked as ours. It is not religious instruction, and it is not engineering advice. Vastu is a tradition, not a building code. No rule in it replaces your structural engineer, your local byelaws or a soil report.

