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Architect's *Vastushastra* Had TiE Attendees Buzzing

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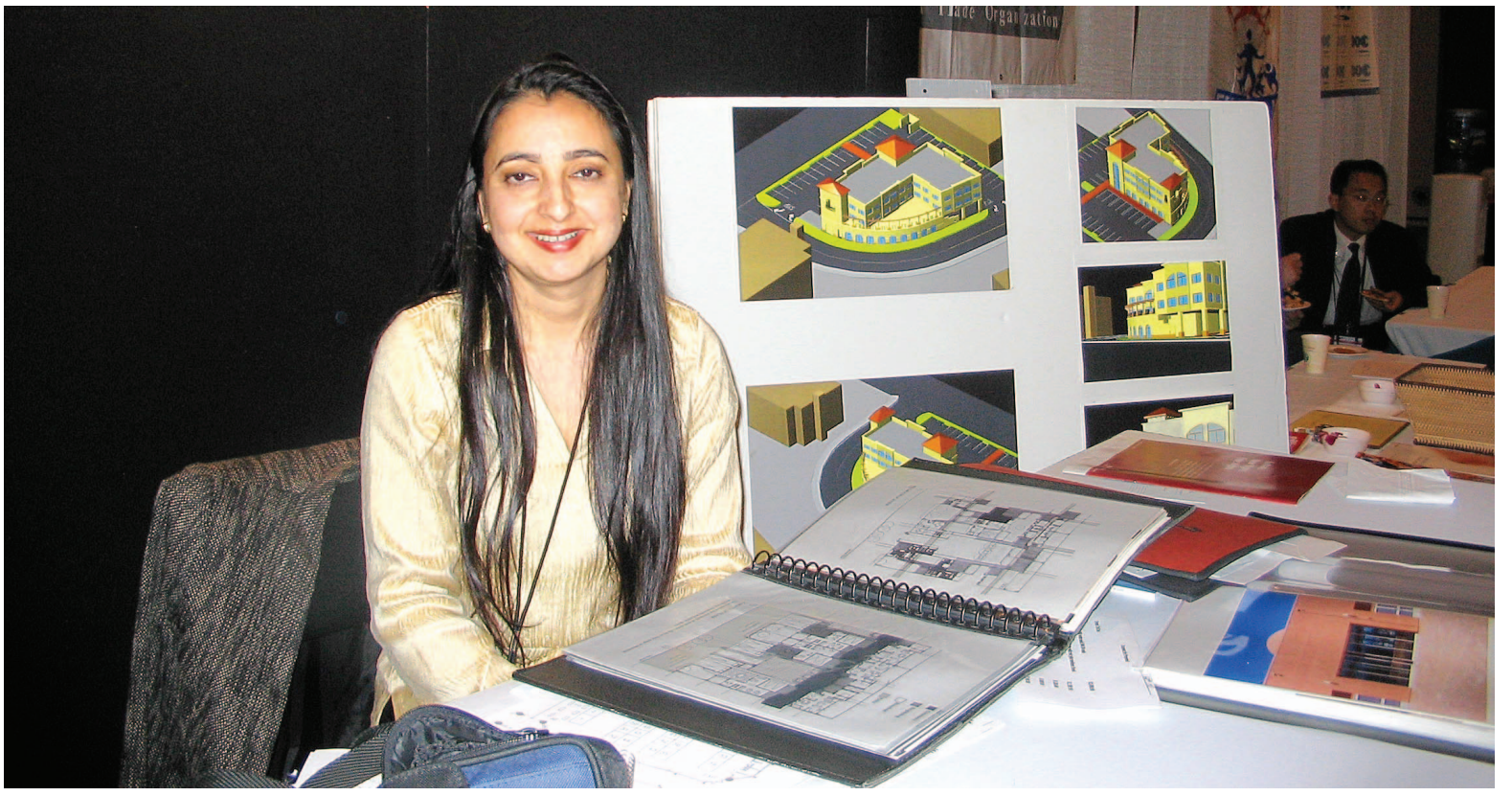


Sandhya Sood, of Berkeley, Calif.-based architectural firm Accent, displays her work at a booth at TiEcon 2006. (Richard Springer photo)

Attendees at the recent conference of The Indus Entrepreneurs were blissfully unaware that their movements through the labyrinths at the Santa Clara Convention Center had been choreographed by an architect who used *vastushastra* — the practice of harmonic house design — to encourage more interaction.

Sandhya Sood, who studied the nature of traditional courtyard dwellings in Europe and India while gaining her master's degree in architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, has for several years been orchestrating the look and design of the main meeting and display spaces at TiE conferences.

Her purview included everything from booth placements, decorations and lighting to where the food is served and attendee circulation.

The main booth display area, for example, after languishing like a forlorn orphan in its conference debut, has been a beehive of activity for the past few years, with some of that attributed to improved presentation.

This year at TiE's new "E-Bazaar," where prospective entrepreneurs made appointments for brief meetings with lawyers, venture capitalists and service providers, Sood plotted use of the space based upon a *mandala* diagram. (See illustration.)

"A mandala diagram typically has a center or an axis with direction heading," she told **India-West** at the conference. The design that the E-Bazaar layout was based on is called the *vastupurushamandala*. *Purusha* represents the human figure and the mandala that it sits in, the cosmos."

"The navel of this figure coincides with the geometric center of the diagram, symbolically representing the center of the energy field."

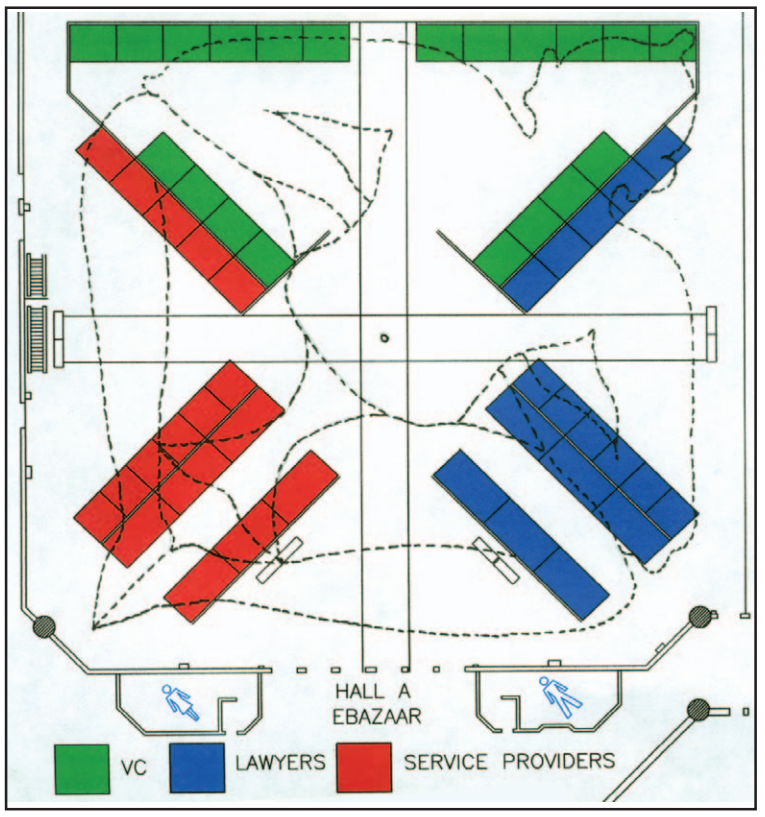
The primary axis of the space, Sood said, "was the processional path accentuated by the red carpet culminating in the VC area. The secondary axes led to the directional headings of the lawyers and the service providers." The goal, she added, was for the consulting areas to stay "private and undisturbed, much like the limbs of the *purusha* in repose."

The method seemed to work, as attendees gravitated to the room's center and smoothly found their way to private sessions with the experts.

Social harmony is an ongoing theme for Sood, a Berkeley, Calif.-based architect whose full-service firm, Accent, specializes in interior and exterior home design, with "multiple use of floor space."

She sees a growing disconnect among people who live in cookie-cutter developments — what she calls the "frozen typology" of single-family living.

The conundrum, she told **India-West**, was "how could one type of dwelling, namely the single-family suburban house, cater to non-typical family groups of extended families, single parents, the elderly or groups of artists?"



Architect Sandhya Sood designed the E-Bazaar hall at TiEcon 2006 by using a mandala diagram. The belly button of the human figure is at the center of the space. Design by: accentarchitecture.com.

Sood realized that just importing the courtyard design of India or Europe would not work, since "the historical context of these dwellings was far from today's urban need of privacy, ownership and the importance of the automobile."

What Sood, who obtained her bachelor's degree in architecture from the Chandigarh College of Architecture, came up with is what she calls the "intergenerational house." The dwelling forms "a hierarchy of usable outdoor spaces by the physical placement of detached, semi-detached or terraced house in context with adjoining houses and the pedestrian street." (See photo.)

When interaction is called for, the courtyards are "read" by residents as connectors. When privacy is needed, the courtyards are seen as separators. "Courtyards are designed at different levels of transition — from house to cluster to community," she pointed out.

"By building choices of access to the individual house, there is no front or back," Sood stated, "and hence the functional spaces inside the house can be flipped or be flexible in their placement."

In Sood's design, cul-de-sacs in housing developments are replaced by pedestrian streets, with front porches, terraces, balconies and neighborhood common places for community interactions.

She said that one of the jurors of her master's thesis, noted housing guru Michael Dennis of MIT, said of her design, " 'This is the way housing should be built.' "

Sood is currently working on the design of a mixed use building in the city of Davis, and the mayor of Berkeley has appointed her as his representative on a task force for the planned Ashby BART Station Redevelopment project, which will include high-density infill housing.

Her hypothesis, she said, is that a "diverse-built fabric" can be created in housing developments to reinvigorate communities "with the same density as (the) cul-de-sac neighborhood and as required by the city zoning laws."

The design of two dwellings by architect Sandhya Sood shows courtyards and pedestrian areas that can function as both shared spaces and dividers.