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INSPIRED MINDS

Elizabeth Hardwick

A DEDICATED YOGI and student of Ayurveda, architect Elizabeth Hardwick has designed four studios in New York, including the Jivamukti Yoga Center and the Laughing Lotus Yoga Center.

YOGA JOURNAL: How did you come to design your first yoga studio?

ELIZABETH HARDWICK: Not long after I started to do yoga, in 1996, I realized that designing a studio would be more of a celebration of life than anything I'd done before. A year later, the ceiling collapsed at my studio, Jivamukti, and the owners asked me to help them fix it. Soon after, I suggested that they find a bigger space for the yoga center; classes were overflowing. I did the design for them, and their Lafayette Street studio opened in 1998.

YJ: What spiritual sources do you draw on for your studio designs?

EH: There's always an overall concept that dictates the execution. For my most recent project, the Laughing Lotus Yoga Center, the rooms are laid out according to a mandala, a diagram of the journey to enlightenment. The story goes that the first thing you do is drop your material baggage, so we put the coat-check room first. Beyond that is the reception desk, set beneath a hanging lotus, the symbol of the goal of liberation. And, as the next stop on the path is ritual adornment, the changing room follows. Then you make a turn. Usually when you encounter a spiritual path, it's a turn away from what you had been doing. Here, you turn to two different asana rooms: one with warm pink lights to support the lower, or physical, chakras and another with cool blue lights to support the higher chakras, the creative and spiritual ones. Finally, each room has windows looking back down the hallway, so you never feel separated from your path.

YJ: How does the design affect the yoga experience?

EH: When you get the external and the internal to match, when you're in harmony with your environment, it's a speedier trip to your center, to the feeling you get when you really feel the "ahhh" of a pose. —Melissa Wagenberg

