

## Small sacred spaces

### *Altars of Power and Grace: Create the Life You Desire*

By Robin and Michael Mastro  
Balanced Books, 2004  
Paperback, 182 pages, \$19.95

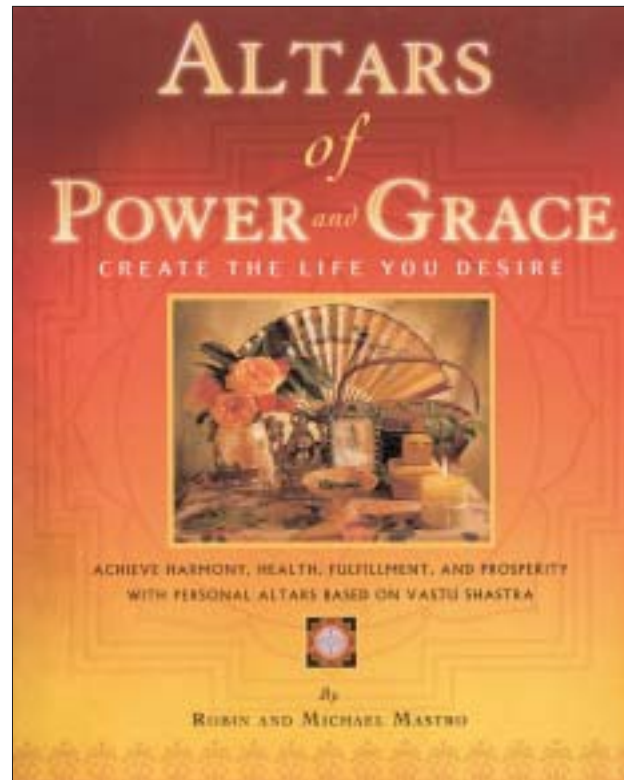
By Josephine Bridges

*The Asian Reporter*

**A**ltars of Power and Grace has a gorgeous cover in rich shades of orange and yellow blending into each other. Below the luminous title is a photograph of a tabletop altar containing a fan, peach-colored roses, boxes, a bowl, a basket, a lemon-yellow candle, and a framed snapshot of a child at the beach. Geometric designs called yantras appear in miniature below this photograph and on the spine. It's a paperback, but it's got fold-in flaps that give it that solid feel of a hardcover book. As for what's inside, you can judge this book by its cover.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, "The Knowledge of Sacred Empowerment," describes the system the authors use for creating altars and its precursor, Vastu Shastra, "the primary system of sacred architecture used in India for more than seven thousand years." There's an introduction to the eight "basic human desires, or aspirations" covered in depth in the second section of the book, and the elements of an altar, which the authors describe as "a microcosm of our larger universe in perfect order without obstruction." General techniques for preparing and activating an altar bring this section to a close.

The second section presents altars based on eight common aspirations, as well as altars for special occasions and an altar dedicated to world peace. Each of the aspirations chapters begins with a full-page photo of an altar and some personal observations from the author on the nature of the aspiration and its fulfillment. A guide to the placement of the various components of the altar comes next,



followed by specific suggestions for components. There's an "activation ceremony" which takes place once the altar has been assembled, and a chart of "correspondences," which include everything from days of the week to "Lords of the Directions." Photographs and verbal descriptions of several related altars complete each chapter.

The highlight of the "Abundance" chapter is a large photograph of an altar that includes four dollar bills beautifully interwoven and framed. Surprising correspondences appear in the "Relationships" chapter: Monday is this aspiration's day of the week, eucalyptus its smell, and rat its animal. A provocative series of questions about different perceptions of career success and

recognition begins the "Career and Recognition" chapter, and there's even "An Altar of Man's Best Friend" in the "Health and Well-Being" chapter.

The photographs in the "Spirituality" chapter are among the most beautiful, with their relative simplicity and emphasis on the color white. While many success stories are included in this book, the chapter on "Life Changes and Transformation" describes a situation which "did not get better immediately," lest readers think they can expect instant results. The "Creativity and Knowledge" chapter contains the altar of a successful journalist who had been working on an unfinished novel for three years. (That's the one I'm going to try out.) "It has been said that if your mind is 100% empty, your hands 100% active, and your heart 100% full, then there is no room for regret, hesitation, or doubt." These are wise words from "Altars to Attract Helpful People and Universal Support."

"Altars for Special Occasions" — weddings, births, birthdays, and anniversaries — and a three tiered "Global Peace Altar" round out the second section of *Altars of Power and Grace*. The third is the resource section, containing a glossary of terms, a list of "Gods, Goddesses, and Religious Deities," yantras and mantras, and recommended books, websites, and products for altars. There are four pages for readers' notes, but I'd have a hard time defacing them, given how beautiful the borders that surround the blank spaces are.

There was a little more emphasis on keeping the altar area clean and using only unlined paper than I thought was necessary, but given how much else there is to pay attention to in this book, these little flaws are easy to ignore.

You can read *Altars of Power and Grace* from cover to cover, you can dip into areas of special interest, or you can simply drool over the photographs.

The book itself, like the altars it describes, is a small sacred space.