

San Francisco Asia Week, 2016 Festival Event

SACHI, Society for Art & Cultural Heritage of India
in collaboration with Palo Alto Art Center

is honored to present



Chicago journalist and arts and culture specialist

Victoria Lautman

In a discussion on her passionately researched theme

Subterranean Ghosts: India's Vanishing Stepwells

Mahila Baag Jhalra, Jodhpur, mid 16th cen. CE

Palo Alto Art Center | 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto, CA

Rsvp: info@sachi.org; Tel 650-918-6335***The Event is Free and Open to the Public***

India's famous palaces, forts, temples and tombs are must-see tourist attractions that appear in every guide book. But one of the most significant and fascinating categories of architecture is all but unknown throughout the world, including India itself in many cases, having fallen off history's grid.

Stepwells are subterranean edifices unique to the subcontinent, first constructed around the 6th century CE and continuing for over a millennium. As marvels of architecture, engineering and art they are nearly unsurpassed, often enormous in scale and with extraordinary ornamentation, commissioned by both Hindus and Muslims alike. Unlike other historic monuments they performed several vital functions, the most important of which was to provide water year-round, even when it was ten stories deep. Long flights of stairs accessed the bottom most level in dry seasons, while during monsoons the often-ornate structures could fill to the top. Stepwells were also civic centers, spiritual destinations, cool retreats in brutal heat, and essential oases for remote caravans. Thousands once existed throughout the country, but most have disappeared – and continue to – from lack of use and interest. Preserving these unknown wonders requires an international effort.



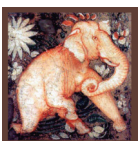
Rajon ki Baoli, Delhi, 1520 CE

Photographs courtesy Victoria Lautman



Victoria Lautman is a Chicago-based print, broadcast and digital journalist and lecturer specializing in arts and culture. After receiving a B.A./Archeology and an M.A./Art History, she joined the staff of the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum, later hosting several public radio programs and embarking on a career in journalism.

Victoria has contributed to a long list of international publications, and was Chicago editor for *Architectural Record*, *Metropolitan Home*, *HG*, and *Art+Auction* before contributing to Indian editions of *Vogue*, *GQ*, and *Architectural Digest* in addition to *The Hindu* and *Wall Street Journal*. As a frequent traveler to India for several decades, she now lectures internationally on India-related topics, including the country's vanishing stepwells. Her book on the topic, from Merrell Publishers, is due in the the Spring. For more on Victoria and her recent blogs, visit www.victorialautman.com



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