

Buddhist Center Rises in Catskills

By LUISA KREISBERG

LEWBEACH, N. Y.—There is a postmaster near here who says that the Catskills are becoming "the cult capital of the East." Not the Far East, the Eastern United States.

The Maharishi International University has taken over the old Waldemere Hotel in Livingston Manor for use as a center for teaching transcendental meditation. The New York Ontological Society has acquired the former Lake Rest Hotel for its headquarters. And now the Buddhists have arrived in the Borscht Belt.

John Gleason, the Livingston Manor postmaster, who noted the cultist influx, terms the Buddhists "choice neighbors," explaining: "They are building something that should stand for centuries."

What they are building is a group of four interlocking structures that are said to be the first in the Western world designed expressly for the study and practice of Zen Buddhism. The complex, known as "Dai Bosatsu Zendo," is rising on a 1,400-acre site in a remote corner of the Beaverkill Valley, five miles northeast of this Sullivan County hamlet.

The three-story, 26,000-square-foot structure will serve as a country retreat for the Zen Studies Society, an organization of about 200 laymen that was founded in 1956 to support the work of Dr. D. T. Suzuki, a Zen scholar who was then teaching in the United States. The society also has a city "zendo," or monastery, in a remodeled carriage house at 223 East 67th Street.

"The New York zendo functions as an entrance gate," says Eido Shimano Roshi, the society's 42-year-old spiritual leader. "Those who feel the need for longer periods of intensive Zen practice . . . will come to Dai Bosatsu for a week or a month or even longer."

What they will find is a rambling, graceful building on a wooded slope overlooking a 30-acre lake and surrounded by 1,400 acres of hardwood forest.

The complex and its site have so far cost about \$2.5-million, most of which was covered by an anonymous gift from a member of the Zen Studies Society. But William P. Johnstone, a retired Bethlehem Steel Corporation executive who is the society's treasurer, says that \$175,000 is still needed to put the finishing touches on the project. If the funds are forthcoming, the target date for completion is July 4, 1976.

Though it is modeled after classic

temples in Kyoto and Kamakura, Japan, that date back as far as the seventh century, the Catskill zendo was designed by a Western architect, Davis Hamerstrom of Roscoe, N.Y., and the general contractors were Holloway Associates of Delhi, N.Y. The building methods were Western, and most of the materials and labor local.

The monastery contains all the facilities required for traditional Zen

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Dai Bosatsu Zendo nestles in a remote corner of the Beaverkill Valley, near Lewbeach, N.Y.

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life: a hall for meditation, or Zazen Hall; a hall for ceremonies, lectures and chanting, or Dharma Hall; rooms for rest and study; a ceremonial tea room, or Dokusan Room; a traditional Japanese dining room with low tables and cushions on the floor; an enclosed courtyard; a formal entry, and a separate reception area with an altar and a statue of Buddha.

The hall for the daily practice of "zazen," or meditation, is a rectangle-within-a-rectangle, surrounded by a five-foot-wide ambulatory for processions by participants who have been sitting in meditation, sometimes for as long as 50 minutes. The tatami-matted room contains a simple altar where a large Buddha statue will be placed.

The residential wings of the structure can house 53 residents and guests. An additional 15 persons may be accommodated in a 12-room lodge that was on the property when the Zen Studies Society bought it in 1971.

The new complex also includes a library, a large kitchen, offices, a meeting room, an infirmary, sewing room, laundry, food storage facilities and a woodworking shop.

The monastery is carefully modeled after traditional Buddhist temples—Mr. Hamerstrom visited Japan several times to study them—but its design has been modified in accordance with Western custom.

It has, for example, private rooms with private showers for residents and guests, the latest in electrical kitchen appliances and a fully equipped laundry. The framework is structural steel, and the walls are cement block, covered with stucco.

One area in which modern technology will not prevail is heating. The entire complex is to be heated with wood-burning furnaces.

"We have a great deal of

wood on the land," explained Mr. Johnstone, who is chairman of the building committee as well as treasurer of the society. "Millions of trees badly need thinning out so that more sun and air can produce a really great forest for the next generation. Fifty acres a year of such thinning will provide our energy."

The roof is the most important architectural element of the new monastery. Constructed of curved laminated wood rafters, covered with plywood and cedar shingles, it appears almost concave.

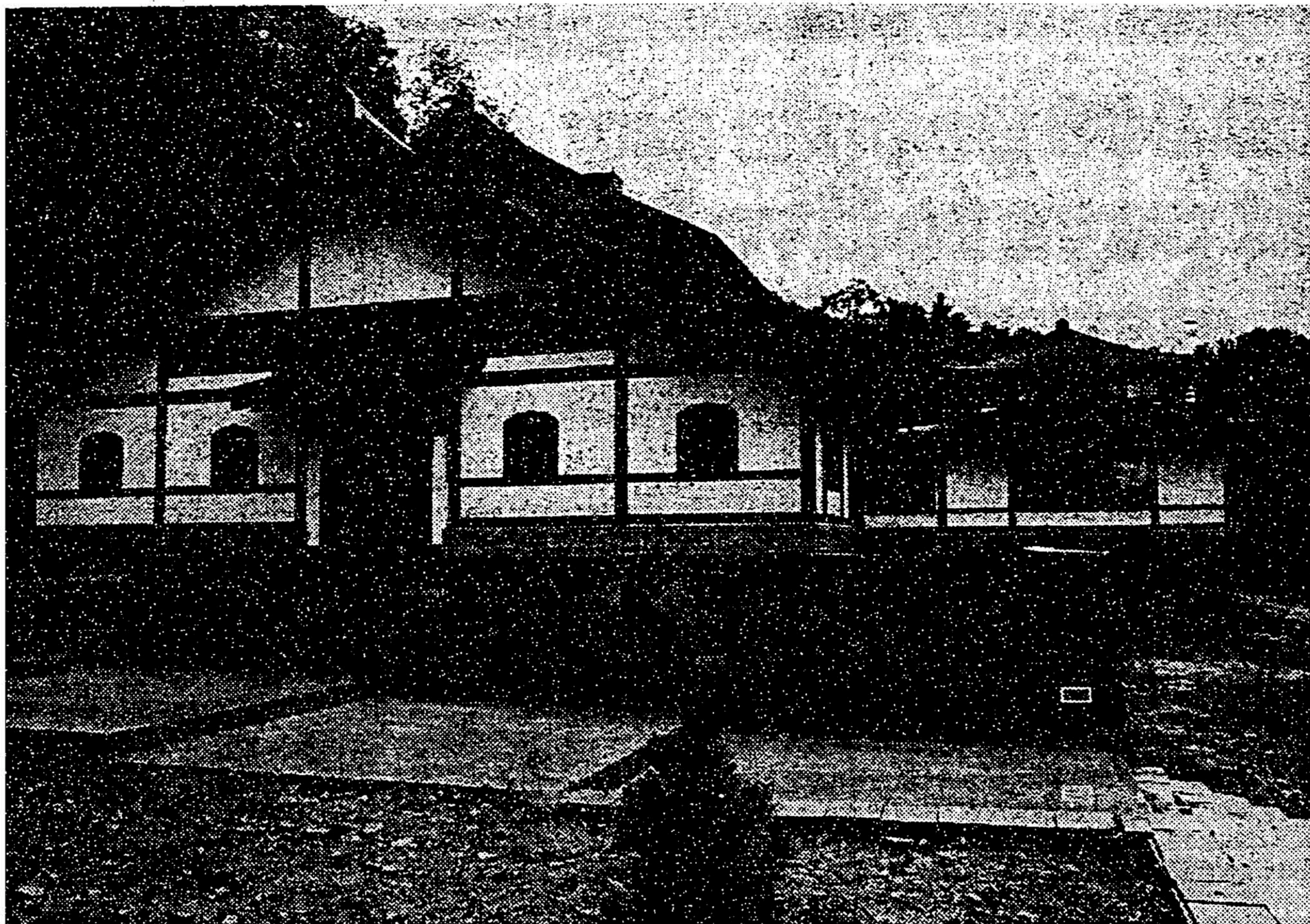
Some other unconventional details are hand-pegged oak floors, 17 decorative windows shaped like candle flames and three "sit tubs" 3½ feet deep.

When it is completed, the zendo is to be completely self-supporting. Operational funds will derive from interest generated by a \$300,000 endowment. Funds will also be raised through visitors' room and board fees (\$35 a week for members and \$50 for nonmembers), contributions, selective logging, the production of maple syrup, the sale of members' crafts and royalties from books.

The "sangha" or family of monks and students who live at the monastery will do most of the maintenance and repair work themselves.

Although the monastery legally qualifies for tax-free status, it remains on the local tax rolls. "We prefer to participate in this way," explains Eido Roshii. "As newcomers to this small village, we would like to establish good public relations."

So far, the public relations are fine. Local residents who have been watching the construction for two years are at once curious and impressed. The popular view is that next to the home of Irving Berlin, the composer, the new monastery is the area's most important landmark.



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The main entrance of the monastery. With its 1,400-acre site, it has so far cost about \$2.5-million.