

Green fingers, and minds

It's back to nature in a school run on principles of harmony. **Steve Cray** reports

Wayan Sumerta falls flat on his face in the mud, showering his colleagues. Not that there's any chance of the hefty martial arts expert injuring himself – he is a black belt in the art of landing safely, as well as kick-boxing, dancing and playing Balinese traditional music.

There is just one day to go before the opening of The Green School on its Kul-Kul campus in Sibang Kaja, Badung, in Bali. Wayan and the team, led by Putu Witsen Widjaya, are rehearsing a demonstration for parents the following morning.

There is more to the Mepantigan Arts they are performing than just the sparring and entertainment, though, for its disciplines are based on the three Balinese principles of harmony – man with man, nature and spirit – that go to the heart of the philosophy of what may be the world's first total eco-school.

Widjaya, who in 2003 invented Mepantigan – a blend of the Indonesian *Pencak Silat* martial art, judo, taekwondo, kick-boxing, Brazilian capoeira and traditional Balinese music and dance – said the arts complemented a curriculum aimed at giving the school's pupils an emotional and spiritual education alongside their academic and intellectual development.

The first batch of 100 pupils come from 16 countries.

The non-profit school, on an 8-hectare site on both sides of the Ayung River, is revolutionary. The open-sided classrooms and furniture are made entirely of bamboo. Classic-looking grass-thatch roofs and bamboo spires complement futuristic sweeping architectural curves that make the buildings look like sculptures.

The compost toilets recycle human waste for the vegetable gardens, a water vortex generates the site's electricity and the pencils are made out of cinnamon bark.

The complex will eventually become a school-centred community, with dormitories, an Outward Bound rope course, summer camps, small businesses and even an old folks' home.



Staff quarters at The Green School (left) in Sibang Kaja, Badung, in Bali, built from bamboo and grass thatch; it's the first day of school and classes begin (right) in one of the airy, open-sided classrooms. Photos: Steve Cray



The project, started in 2006, is the vision of Bali jeweller John Hardy and his wife Cynthia and was the result of their experiments with home-schooling based on Steiner-Waldorf principles.

"In 2002 we moved back to New York and were exposed to Waldorf education and loved how the teachers were with the kids, what holistic education was all about," Mrs Hardy said.

After returning to Bali, the couple looked for an outside education to give their daughters Carina and Chiara (now 12 and eight) a wider circle of friends but were unimpressed with the international schools on offer.

"There were big walls, no Indonesian pupils, no integration with the Indonesian culture, nobody spoke Indonesian," Mrs Hardy said. The values were Playstations, miniskirts, piercings and shopping malls. "Not the life we wanted to expose our kids to."

She said it was educationalist Alan Wagstaff who helped inspire the school-centred community idea with the principles spelled out in his book *Three Springs*.

"He came and ran a seminar in Bali for a week about how you turn kids on by opening up all four cylinders; spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual.

"What a perfect environment to do that in, bamboo buildings outdoors, where you've got animal husbandry and farming, where you can do your maths by planting seeds

in rice fields and can learn about authentic, pragmatic issues through being involved in businesses, which we want to found here," she said.

"The dream is that this is the beginning, the seedling. There are four classrooms, next year there will be eight... we're going to open up a dorm and put in Grade Nine [Form Three]. In 2013 we'll have our first graduating class of high [secondary] school students."

Mr Hardy, who landed in Bali as a travelling art student at the age of 25 in 1975, said the start-up cash came from selling their shares in their jewellery business. It was an opportunity to give something back to Bali.

"This is the bottom line," he said. "Joe Bloggs in the colonial system did whatever he had to do to get as much as he could and came back to England and built a bigger house than Fred Smith on a potato field and was considered a success. We came to Bali, Bali was incredibly good to us and we're not choosing to go back to whatever village we came from and make a difference there. We're choosing to give back here."

Mr Hardy said he was opposed to schools that ignored local cultures.

"It's so important we don't do the international spaceship idea where little Swiss Hans went to Dubai to the Swiss school and then to Shanghai and went to the Swiss school and went back to Switzerland and was untouched by all those places he lived."

He said people "from all over the

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I Gusti Ngurah Agung Watusila, village head



world" were funding children's education by donating via the school's website – they could even have their name on a piece of the bamboo. Twenty per cent of school places would be offered to Balinese pupils on scholarships.

The aim of the school was to empower students to be leaders for the 21st century and help them reverse the damage that had been done to the environment.

"We have stamped the Earth into submission," Mr Hardy said, "It's pretty messed up."

The thinking was that "if you have a relationship with the Earth it's going to be very hard to go on and be in a legal firm on the 31st floor of a high-rise and join the fight to open the national refuge to oil drillers".

"You're just not necessarily going to line up on that side," he said.

The bamboo desks were an environmental lesson in themselves.

"Kids understand that waxing their desk is the new relationship beyond petrochemicals," he said.

Marni Dalle from Vancouver, the school's design manager, and creative director Aldo Landwehr, from Switzerland, said it took 300 workers – 170 staff and 130 contractors – to get the school ready for last week's opening.

"It was as tight a time line as you could imagine," Ms Dalle said. "We had 18 buildings in progress at one point. It was a massive co-

ordination exercise." Mr Landwehr said the buildings took Balinese architectural designs and "maximised what you could do with them". They were based on forms of nature and the physical properties of the wood.

School director Brad Choyst, from Boston, said although there was a vision for the school, there had been no preconceptions.

"This school started with a blank slate. We didn't say, this is what it should look like. We asked what the best possible venue was for students to learn and what the best possible curriculum was for them to prepare for the 21st century to face the challenges."

He said The Green School would help children to develop their inherent curiosity. "We want to create a joyful, inspired, creative environment for people to learn. That's our bottom line."

Classes of 18 to 20 children had three teachers – a lead western, lead Indonesian and intern western – as well as a Balinese "guardian".

Mr Choyst said the school was "a campus, not a compound".

"We're a place where students can go outside and plan a sports field and see the trees and the river and see the pigs and rabbits or

buffalo and plant a garden as part of the curriculum."

The school currently runs kindergarten to Grade Eight (Form Two) classes but Mr Choyst said Grade 12 (Form Six) was expected to open in the next four years, with the school working towards an International Baccalaureate accreditation for the middle years and diploma certificates.

Principal Kathleen Frye, who joined from the Dwight School in New York, said that although Steiner-Waldorf principles were an influence, the school had its own take on them.

"[Waldorf] is also very teacher controlled and directed and I think what we really have to do for kids preparing for the 21st century is that they have to take responsibility for their own learning."

Ms Frye said the high teacher-to-student ratio was aimed at aiding differentiated learning – pupils progressing at different speeds – and taking into account multiple intelligences.

Teacher Andrea Maddy, from Arizona, said the school drew from "the best of many philosophies" with learning based on a "three-frame day".

"There is a thematic lesson in the

morning and that's embedded into everything you do, then there are proficiency subjects, such as maths, followed by practical lessons."

The chief of Sibang Kaja, I Gusti Ngurah Agung Watusila, said the school was the result of a high level of co-operation between its founders, managers and the local community.

Praising Mr Hardy and his team, he said the close relationship reflected the Balinese principles of the three harmonies. "We have to show respect and appreciation for each other, between the village and the school."

He said it was as important to protect the local environment as the global one and welcomed publicity for the local region. "We don't discriminate against any race, religion or nationality. We welcome everyone to come to this village."

More details about the school and sponsorship can be found at <http://www.greenschool.org>

View the slideshow: see more photos and listen to interviews and Balinese music at scmp.com/video



The sculptural all-bamboo bridge that crosses the Ayung River linking the two sides of The Green School campus.

Young eco-warriors ready for battle and study

Parents and pupils were upbeat as The Green School's first day got under way last week.

Londoner Jeremy Brown, working in Bali and with two daughters at the school, said: "This is an amazing project. I like the sustainability, that's all part of it of course but it's more about they're actually doing, the energy. They're writing their own agenda."

Chris Majors, an environmental anthropologist writing a PhD at Perth's Murdoch University, said he wanted his seven-year-old son to become "an open-minded thinker so he's able to ask questions and seek answers himself".

"I believe the Steiner philosophy in general and specifically what this school is trying to create will maximise his potential. I have strong environmental opinions and I aspire, like many other parents, that my children will have a similar ethic."

Jac Peeris, a Canadian-Sri Lankan, working in Bali with a son and daughter at the school, said her hope was that they would be able to help solve environmental and humanitarian issues.

"My hope and dream is that my

children will come out at the age of 18 and be able to contribute and solve the problems that threaten the survival of all us."

Ketut Susana Zanzan, who works in Bali's museum of art and has two children at the school, felt "integrated" with the school because of its green approach. "Also they want to create leaders for their generation. As a parent I feel so lucky and so proud of it."

Naoyoshi and Naomi Murakami, from Japan, moved their five-year-old

daughter from another Bali school. "If I was still a child I would want to learn here. I like the school concept, the philosophy and the environment," Mr Murakami said.

Speaking at the end of the first day of school, pupils Mati Wallensky, 13, from Australia, Gemma McGovern Tyler, 13, from Britain, Isami Said Rashid, 14, from Hawaii and Siddhartha Phillips, 13, from Bali, said they were surprised at how different this school was.

"My parents saw it and told me it

was different but I wasn't expecting everything to be made out of bamboo," Mati said.

Isami said the school was much bigger than he expected. "It is amazing to see how much effort has been put into everything. The first day here was a lot different from first days at other schools. Everybody is different, the teaching. The place is very inspiring and everybody is willing to change," he said.

Gemma said she was apprehensive in the run-up to the first day because she was a city girl "and used to cars and stuff". Although she wasn't sure about "doing farming and gardening" the school was refreshing departure from a "normal" one.

Isami said he was positive the school's philosophy of producing a generation of eco-warriors to fight for the planet would pay off.

"The younger generation is us and everybody is going to look to us to make things healthy. The ways that we deal with the world will be a lot different. I'm sure we'll be able to help the world. This is the start."

Steve Cray



Mati Wallensky, Gemma Tyler, Isami Rashid and Siddhartha Phillips.

Drs. Richard Charles and Esther Yewpick Lee Charitable Foundation The R C Lee Centenary Scholarship 2009

The Drs. Richard Charles and Esther Yewpick Lee Charitable Foundation invites applications for the R C Lee Centenary Scholarship for the academic year 2009.

There will be a maximum of 3 scholarships each year. The scholarship will normally last for the duration of the scholar's chosen course at a university of his or her choice outside Hong Kong. This scholarship supports programmes at doctoral, master's or bachelor's level and covers tuition fees, accommodation costs, living expenses, books, incidental expenses, return airfare and subsidy for foreign travel during vacations.

Applicants must have gained an admission offer from their chosen university to study their chosen course; have obtained first class honours degrees from their university in Hong Kong; be able to communicate effectively in English as well as the language in which their studies will be undertaken, if different; and be under the age of 25 years on the closing date for applications. Students who do not have an admission offer by the closing date for applications and final-year undergraduate students may still apply.

Successful candidates will be those who can be expected to make a substantial contribution to Hong Kong during the course of their working lives. They must therefore show excellent scholastic achievements, strong leadership abilities, extensive general knowledge and civic mindedness and good communication skills.

More information and application forms for the scholarship are obtainable from the offices which handle scholarship administration at local universities; from the R C Lee Centenary Scholarship Secretariat, c/o Mrs. Clara Lee, at PO Box 3038, General Post Office, Hong Kong; or from the scholarship website at www.rcleescholarship.com

Completed applications together with ALL supporting documents must be returned to the Scholarship Secretariat **no later than October 6, 2008**. Late, incomplete or improperly completed applications will not be considered. For enquiries, please call 2644 0586 or send an email to rcleescholarship@gmail.com