

Brave



*In an overlooked corner of Bali sits the **Green School**, an enterprise that forges new ground in education, architecture and technology, and unashamedly takes on that trite ideal of “saving the world.”
Christina Ko reports*

World



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E'RE FOLLOWING JOHN HARDY DOWN the proverbial rabbit hole, except that instead of a time-conscious white rabbit ahead of us, it's a sari-sporting red-faced environmental evangelist who's about to blow our minds with his vision and accomplishments. And instead of a rabbit hole, it's a manmade tunnel lined in

a smoked rubber-cotton membrane, just one of the experiments they are testing at the Green School in Bali, though it's one that, Hardy informs us, "doesn't really work." ¶ Whether it works or not as an environmentally friendly material for shelter or otherwise is really a moot point; Hardy's Green School has advanced so many innovations already, it's difficult to feel disappointed over one work in progress.

Chief among the innovations is the idea for the Green School itself, a self-sufficient standalone campus situated deep in the suburbs of Bali that practices and advocates environmentally conscious learning and living.

Hardy is best known as a jeweller, whose eponymous brand set the standard for eco-friendly luxury goods around the world. His follow-up enterprise was in hospitality, the Bambu Indah, a Bali-based green hotel. Now, funded by the sale of his jewellery brand, his focus is on the Green School, whose origins were in a utopian vision that Hardy read about and wanted to

visit. Since he couldn't visit it – it didn't exist – he built it. "I was reading a piece by an educator in New Zealand called Alan Wagstaff, called *Three Springs*. It was written in a way that made it sound like it existed, and when I read it, I wanted to go there because it was a community-centred school. And I also watched this video called *Exponential Time: Shift Happens*, which describes very clearly what our kids are going to have to deal with. Problems we don't know exist with solutions we don't know exist. So I wanted to develop a school that really taught people how to think."

Edgar Allen Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* seems to act as a fitting analogy for our planet and its citizens' self-destructive impulses. Poe's protagonist kills his enemy (though who knows how this enemy has wronged him) and buries him underneath the floorboards, committing the perfect murder – or so he thinks. As he soaks in his victory, the sound of a beating heart plagues him till he confesses his sin. Likewise, we have needlessly and ruthlessly plundered our planet, and got away with it. But there are those, Hardy among them, who hear the beating of the telltale heart.

While many would be daunted by the prospect of changing an existing doctrine of disposability, Hardy has taken it upon himself to completely recondition his way of thinking and acting, a concept that extends to the Green School. This is self-sustenance to the nth degree. All food consumed on the premises is grown on the premises; electricity is generated by a hydro-powered "vortex," and even the infrastructure



- classroom buildings, staff housing, etc
- is mostly made from materials grown on campus.

If there is one key building block here, it's bamboo. Previously believed to have no function in modern, permanent architecture, it plays a vital part at the Green School, where it is soaked in borax to decrease its desirability to hungry termites before being used copiously to create curvaceous structures with swooping roofs and modern geometric motifs that unexpectedly recall the revolutionary silhouettes of Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, rather than the stereotypes of wicker and rattan lawn furnishings. The versatility of the structures is also noteworthy, with distinct differences in the canteen, gymnasium, staff housing, classrooms, administrative structures and the jewel in the crown, a two-floor open space they call the Heart of School, set to be the tallest bamboo structure in South-East Asia, maybe even the world over. Here, 18-metre-high bamboo beams of varying thicknesses grasp at the sky, on them engraved the names of the school's many benefactors, from Hong Kong society types like Bradley Gardner and Debbie Marden, to global luminaries like



HARDY TIMES

John Hardy's relaxed exterior belies a serious dedication to greening the world



Damien Hirst and Donna Karan, to those on a corporate level who have shown support, financial or otherwise, such as *Asia Tatler*.

In the wide expanses of greenery that separate the buildings, we find all manner of flora and fauna, including the foodstuffs that are cooked and served on campus. Ambling down one path, Hardy hands us pea shoots, fresh lemongrass and other souvenirs of our tour: "If you control land and you don't grow food on it, you're part of the problem," he notes matter-of-factly.

Organic vegetables aren't all they produce. From across the bridge there is a gentle cacophony, emitted from a large, spherical cage-like structure. Discarding our pea shoots, we are instructed to climb onto the surface of the cage like children on monkey bars, for a bird's eye view of The Vortex. This technological marvel was pioneered last year by Austrian engineer Franz Zotlöterer to aerate water and generate electricity, using a large water wheel to produce hydropower without harming fish and other sea life. Near the apex of the cage (safe or not for fish, you don't want to fall in), we release branches into the whirlpool, watching in fascina-

The Vortex was pioneered last year to aerate water and generate electricity



FROM FAR LEFT:
Simple and dynamic classroom architecture; names inscribed on bamboo pillars at Heart of School; a simple Vortex is able to generate enough electricity for the entire campus

**INSPIRE
IMPACT**

A stunning campus coupled with a worthy agenda makes the Green School popular with tour groups who often visit for campus tours.

*"We looked for a school for our kids and couldn't find one. **So we built one**"*

tion as the turbine swallows the offerings. This simple operation is able to generate enough electricity for the entire campus, which spans nearly eight hectares.

But all of these breakthrough measures are solutions for now; they haven't touched at the future, which is what the Green School should really be about: nurturing young minds with the knowledge and desire to change the world. On cue, and with as much bravado as can be mustered while wearing a sarong and gesturing with a green bean for a pointer, Hardy points to a clearing filled with potted bamboo saplings separated into makeshift pots. "This," he declares, "is the future."

Growing bamboo may be fine for architectural needs, but it takes a truly brilliant mind to convert that into a bright and shining tomorrow the way that Hardy has. With the scale at which the Green School is growing, they will have plenty of bamboo needs in the future, but they may not have the hectareage to support the growth of large crops. Instead, this batch of seedlings is distributed in surrounding towns to families with babes in tow, to plant in their backyards. The ensuing harvest will then be sold back to the Green School over the years, and as Hardy has calculated "one of these pots will yield enough bamboo to put their child, and their child's child through school." In the past year, Hardy and his team of green crusaders distributed 13,000 seedlings in surrounding towns.

As for the children studying at Green School now, who range from kindergarten to Year Eight for the moment, they are flourishing under a curriculum that combines traditional classroom



TOP SEED

ABOVE The students plant seedlings as a class exercise
BELOW FROM LEFT The "bubble" is an inflatable and air-conditioned classroom equipped with a projector; the field of seedlings



learning with application-based projects that advance different sets of principles important in the real world and to the future of the planet. The noise surrounding the school's development and curriculum has already convinced more than one family to relocate to Bali for the express purpose of enrolling children in the Green School. "The truth is that many people around the world are squatting beside a school. What's more important than school?" Hardy questions. The mother of Chinese scholar Mencius, for one, famously extolled the virtues of education by relocating their home first from a cemetery, then a marketplace, before

situating them adjacent to a school, granting Mencius with his lifelong thirst for knowledge. The Hardys have followed a similar protocol, but taken it one step further. "We were looking for a school for our kids and couldn't find one we liked. So we built one." The Hardy children, aged nine and 12, both attend the Green School.

Beyond the benefits he's giving his own next generation, Hardy dreams of leaving his mark on the world. "In thirty years' time, there's going to be the question: what did Grandpa do? What did Grandma do? It would be nice to be part of the future, in that conversation, rather than hanging onto the last designer bag till the end of days. American presidents worry about their legacy, but really everyone should worry about that." If he really is worried, the proof is in the organically manufactured pudding. In the words of one Green School student, Year Seven's Matilda Wallensky, "We have to respect the environment because it's the only thing we have that's close to magic." That's a legacy. ■



FACTS & FIGURES

STUDENTS ENROLLED
105 students

CLASS SIZE
16-18 students

TEACHER-STUDENT RATIO
1:8 to 1:10

LANGUAGES
English and Bahasa Indonesia

TUITION FEES
Ranging from US\$4,500 to US\$8,950 yearly

