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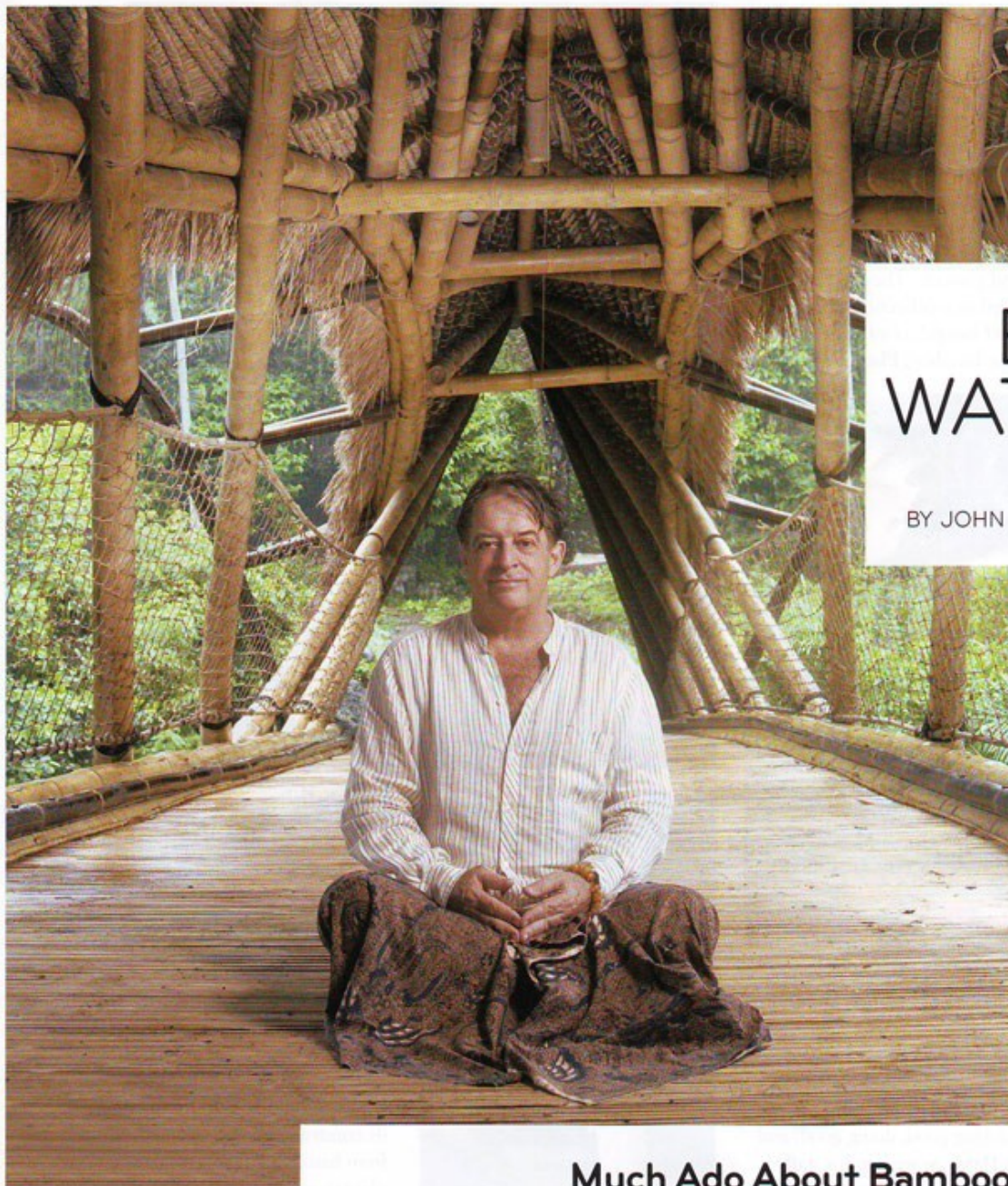


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ECO WATCH

BY JOHN LANGENHEIM



Much Ado About Bamboo

On Bali, a humble harvest yields style and sustainability

I'M STANDING IN WHAT COULD WELL BE THE LARGEST BAMBOO building in the world. More precisely, I'm clinging to a flimsy scaffold 15 meters above the ground, enveloped by a web of crisscrossing bamboo struts that cascades down from one of three bamboo towers. This is the Three Mountains Factory, the latest low-impact structure to grace John Hardy's base of operations in the village of Mambal, deep in the cultural heartland of Bali. To describe the Canadian-born jewelry designer's HQ as whimsical would be an understatement: the grounds boast cobblestone paths, patches of iridescent rice, arbors spilling passionflowers, a babbling brook, and a hodgepodge of buildings variously constructed from bamboo, mud, and thatch. You

BAMBOO BOOSTER Jeweler-turned-conservationist John Hardy on the bamboo bridge at School for Life near Ubud, one of his latest endeavors.

half expect a hobbit to come ambling out of one of the little doorways.

Instead, it is a sarong-clad John Hardy who emerges from the nearby Kapal Bambu, or "bamboo boat," an elegant structure built on a raised platform that does indeed look like the inverted hull of a ship. Completed in 2005, this showroom is where Hardy displays his latest designs—exquisitely crafted adornments in silver characterized by linked sections that swoop and

ECO WATCH

curve back into themselves, with features like beaten-gold fascia and constellations of precious stone. These pieces, many employing Balinese silversmithing traditions, allowed Hardy and his wife Cynthia to build a multimillion-dollar-a-year business, one which they recently sold—though still manage—in order to concentrate on their environmental projects. There is bamboo here too, represented in a collection of culm-shaped sterling-silver bangles of varying sizes. As part of Hardy's Wear Bamboo, Plant Bamboo

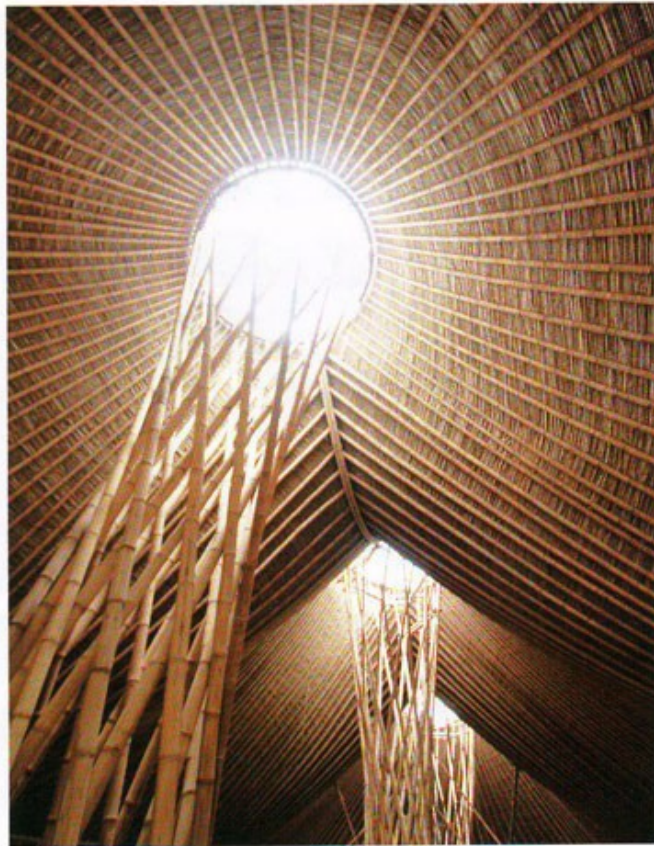


campaign, a portion of the bracelets' purchase price goes to the planting of bamboo on the small neighboring island of Nusa Penida, which is largely deforested. Each piece is engraved with the specific number of stalks planted—anywhere from four to 26.

"It's all about looking good, doing good, and feeling good," says Hardy as we join his staff for a communal lunch at a table laden with organic food, almost all of which—the rice, the vegetables, the grilled duck—is grown or raised on site. "When you buy one of these bracelets, bamboo shoots will be prepared in a nursery and planted on Nusa Penida by subsistence farmers. When it's grown, we'll buy the bamboo back from them and use it."

Why this obsession with bamboo? In an age when the world's forests are disappearing at an alarming rate, buzzwords like "sustainability" and "ecological integration" have become part of the new architectural lexicon. Bamboo—a perennial grass that

grows faster than any other plant on the planet, is 50 times stronger than oak yet light and flexible; and that, if treated correctly, lasts for decades—



ECO CHIC Clockwise from above: A bedroom at Bambu Indah; one of the hotel's antique Javanese guesthouses; inside the all-bamboo Three Mountains Factory.

holds an obvious appeal. The only question is whether this humble plant can be accepted as a mainstream building and design material.

To that end, Hardy has founded another company—Bambu Bali—dedicated to cultivating and manipulating bamboo for a wide range of practical uses, from furniture to jewelry to built environments, including Hardy's latest showcase, a school slated to open later this year. Set on eight hectares of verdant land near Ubud, the School for Life aims to be a model of sustainability both in its construction and operation. Built largely from bamboo culled from Hardy's own plantations, it applies cutting-edge techniques to sustainable materials to achieve futuristic curvatures and profiles.

"I believe it will be the first school in Bali to accept boarders. We're creating bamboo accommodation for students and for families," says Hardy. "There will even

be a prototype bamboo hotel on site catering to volunteers and to those who simply want to come by and see what we're doing."

Teaching will center on what the school's newly appointed director, Brad Choyt, describes as a "vibrant, holistic curriculum" that encourages environmental responsibility and entrepreneurial development. Bisected by the Ayung River, the campus will feature everything from a cultural center to aquaculture ponds and "edible mazes" thick with produce, as well as a gymnasium, an organic chocolate factory, and even a high-ropes course threading its way through the treetops. Many structures have

already been built, including an eight-meter-long bamboo bridge based on a classic Da Vinci arch design.

The Hardys also recently opened Bambu Indah ("beautiful bamboo"), a tiny hotel comprising four antique wooden houses from Java ranged around a central dwelling built entirely of rare giant black bamboo. The back-to-nature retreat is situated close to Hardy's own home on Sayan Terrace, a spectacular ridge above the Ayung River that opens onto a vista of stepped rice paddies and mossy stone temples.

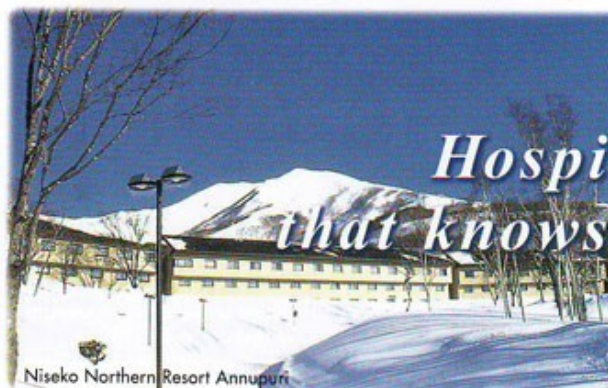
Hardy himself is inheriting a legacy, however, for it was another longtime Bali resident who laid the groundwork for his current endeavors. "Linda Garland was my inspiration," he says simply. "She turned bamboo into a legitimate building material, extending its lifespan considerably through new types of treatment." Having spent years creating tropical vacation homes around the world, Garland became an early champion of bamboo as a sustainable alternative to rain-forest hardwoods in construction and furniture design, establishing the non-profit Environmental Bamboo Foundation in 1993. Her Panchoran Retreat, a riverside estate on the outskirts of Ubud, is a testament to both her design acumen and her environmental commitment: an enchanting resort, it is also home to more than 200 species of indigenous bamboo, representing the plant's entire genetic stock in Indonesia.

While Hardy and his creative team are taking bamboo design to new heights, quite literally, Dutch designer Gerard van Vloten is bringing it to the micro level. Rather than working with

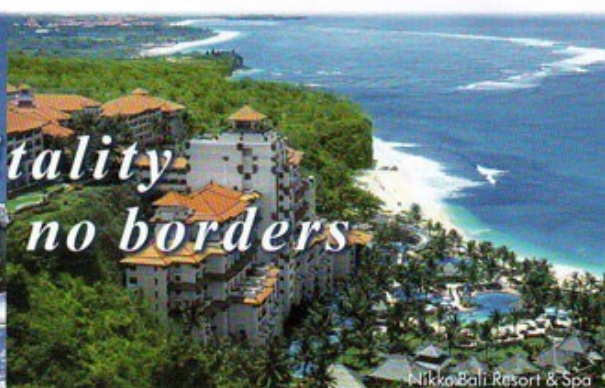
bamboo poles, his company, B21 Concepts, combines bamboo fiber with Polyethylene terephthalate (P.E.T., a recyclable polymer resin used for everything from space-station insulation to common plastic bottles) to create a composite membrane insulated with a foam honeycomb. B21 uses this to create prefab housing units where the furnishings are built-in structural elements. Light enough to float on water and easily expandable, the units can be assembled or disassembled in a day, and exported to anywhere in the tropics. "We're taking bamboo into the 21st century," says van Vloten, who sources his bamboo from Linda Garland. "Bamboo is the strongest natural fiber in the world, while waste P.E.T. is abundantly available and inexpensive." With van Vloten about to complete his first units, wealthy vacationers could soon be buying their holiday homes "to go."

From high technology to archaic revivals, the rise of bamboo looks set to be a feature of 21st-century architecture and by association, tourism. And it's perhaps fitting that it's on the tiny island of Bali, recent venue for the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference, that many of its most exciting trails are being blazed. ©

For more information on John Hardy's environmental projects, see sustainableadvertising.org. Visits to the John Hardy Workshop and Kapal Bambu showroom (62-361/469-888; johnhardy.com) can be arranged directly or through the concierge at Bambu Indah (333 Jalan Raya Sayan, Ubud; 62-361/975-124; bambuindah.com; doubles from US\$250).



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