



A School For Life

Bali's new Green School aims to inspire a love of learning, a connection with the environment, and an entrepreneurial mindset that will equip its students to deal with whatever challenges their futures may hold.

On the Kul-Kul Campus in Sibang Kaja, a small village in Mambal that lies southwest of Ubud and northwest of Denpasar, what was until recently eight hectares of untouched lush jungle valley has been transformed into a school that feels truly alive.

The Green School, which opened its doors to over 100 students from sixteen countries in September 2008, was founded by Bali-based entrepreneurs John and Cynthia Hardy, who were partly motivated by their dissatisfaction with the educational options on offer in Bali for their own daughters, as well as conscious of an opportunity to "give something back" to Bali, having sold their share of the luxury jewellery brand that they built together on this island, and which still bears the John Hardy name.

Their ambitious goal for this novel enterprise is "to create a new paradigm for learning." At a time when the future seems less within the grasp of our imaginative capabilities than ever before, it has become necessary to find ways of preparing children to cope with whatever circumstances will await them as they enter adulthood. This calls for a flexibility and an adaptive approach that perhaps does not naturally develop within the confines of our traditional understanding of what constitutes a 'good' education.

It is a time to be bold. Sir Ken Robinson, an internationally renowned expert in the field of creativity and innovation in education, said at the 2006 TE D conference in California: "Nobody

has a clue...what the world will look like in five years time, and yet we're meant to be educating them for it...My contention is that creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status."

Enter the Green School, probably the biggest, bravest experiment in education ever undertaken in Indonesia. "The Green School aims to produce graduates who can confidently try different ways of solving problems," says Ronald Stones, OBE, member of the Board of Directors. "It offers an education which holds onto certain conventions of schooling in a stunning setting that inspires creative thinking and problem solving."

Mr. Stones is one of the international education experts from whose experience the school management benefits. Having served as headmaster at several British international schools, his familiarity with more traditional educational structures is profound. So too, however, is his recognition of the need for an evolution.

"We are in a fast-changing world and as educationalists, our role is to prepare young people for their adult world," he told *Kabar* recently. "There will be careers in ten years' time that we cannot even conceive today. Young adults of tomorrow are going to have to be flexible, adaptable people who can look at the world differently."

The curriculum of the Green School is Steiner-inspired, within an IB (International Baccalaureate) framework, taught through a holistic approach that seeks to develop the intellect while also nurturing each child's emotional, spiritual and social progress.



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Pictured right: gardens, happy kids, and the stunning bamboo bridge over the Ayung river.

Apart from classroom work, an on-campus Learning Village will offer students the chance to gain hands-on experience of how businesses function, under the supervision of professionals, in a variety of enterprises that will range from chocolate-making to ceramics to publishing.

The school's environmental focus is a natural fit with its location in an area of rural Bali still untouched by tourism. Creating the campus was a process that in itself involved a lot of experimentation and learning, undertaken to create a site that is sustainable and resourceful in the fullest sense. The school is happy to share the results of this process with others, whether these stem from exploring of the possibilities of bamboo architecture, or creating hydropower through a nine-metre vortex driven by the water of the Ayung river.

Bamboo, *alang-alang* and traditional mud walls form the structures of the buildings. The open-air classrooms are designed to catch passing breezes, which, combined with fans, a more natural ventilation while providing shelter on rainy days. Even the blackboards are made from bamboo. Fast growing and versatile, when treated with borax salt bamboo is immune from the attentions of bugs and termites and thus very durable. But rarely has the material seemed so glorious as it does here; the stunning bamboo bridge has an iconic quality, and to stand on it listening to the rush of water from the Ayung river below is a meditation.

For a tour of the Green School campus, or to get further information, call +62 361 469875 or visit www.greenschool.org

The campus is also home to goats, buffalo, rabbits, shrimp, fish and many other creatures. Balinese *tiang hidup*, or living fences, mark the campus boundaries, the leaves of which feed

animals, while the plants replenish the nitrogen content of the soil. The beautiful Bali cow plays her part too: methane produced creates bio gas to fuel stoves, while the remaining manure is used as fertilizer. Solar-powered electric fences enclose the pigs on campus, and are moved in rotation so that the pigs can act as natural land cultivators.

A variety of organic permaculture gardens throughout the campus supply fresh fruit and vegetables, and rice. Through planting and harvesting, students will learn about natural life cycles and fully experience a connection with the environment.

Tuition fees are comparable to those of the established international schools in Bali and in fact less expensive than some. But as distinct from these, 20% of the places at the Green School are reserved for Indonesian scholarship students, giving them the opportunity to benefit from a unique style of international education while staying close to their own communities, and empowering them to play a part in the environmental leadership that could prove vital for the preservation of Bali's natural beauty.

It is envisioned that within a few years the whole campus will be a year-round community of summer camps and symposia, exposing students to new ideas and learning from around the world, while in 2009 the Green School is set to become Bali's first boarding school.

“I believe that deep, meaningful change has to start with learning that will cultivate a respect for the environment and give students the tools they will need to become stewards of the natural world,” says Director Brad Choyt. “I hope that we can do this here at Green School and that these ideas will catch and grow well beyond Indonesia.” *





Living with Bamboo

In 2008, novelist Charlotte Bacon left New York for Bali and a dramatically different way of life, within a bamboo home in a tropical jungle, where her relationships with the humans and creatures that surround her are closer than ever before.

My house was born from the jungle that surrounds it, three tiers of bamboo, grass, cotton and stone. Wind runs through it like floodwater through a riverbed. Night and day, it sways, a shaded, living hammock as envisioned by Modernists. It shelters two kids, a man, a woman. But my sense of family's grown since we moved to Bali from New York, my notions of what's human, too. I claim now, because my house has asked me to, the armored beetles who arrive at dusk. The dogs sleeping on the gravel below the first floor. The geckos that cling to the central beams. Our house has room for them and more.

Because we have no outside doors that lock, no walls that barricade our view, we see and know our neighbors on the path that curves beyond the garden. The women on their way to temple, the children off to school. We wave and say hello and have the favor returned.

Since our house is at the center of a new campus, students visit us, as well as architects and journalists. Westerners and Indonesians. Parents, children, scheduled guests and spontaneous ones. We plan and host open houses, events at which everyone's welcome to see and learn about Green School, which as its name implies, will be a haven for sustainability. But I'm willing to take the metaphor even further: we are actually living the idea of "open house," and it's provoked a cascade

of changes in our lives, our ways of thinking. Without heavy walls or windows, we're not just conscious of life cycles, we're cycling through multiple layers of life. We're connected with the people we live near, through sight, sound, contact. From my study on the third level, I once heard the intricate weave of five languages at once: Balinese; Javanese; Bahasa Indonesian; French and English. Add the chat of goats, cows, dogs and insects, frogs, a toddler, and myriad birds and it's like living inside a singing dictionary of vast and humbling scope.

Like the animals and people within our newly widened sense of home, the elements aren't something we shield ourselves from, either. We've got to embrace them, from rain storms to gusts of wind, searing days to chilly ones. We're having to shift our definitions of everything from privacy to comfort and that means opening ourselves to possibility, to risk. I don't want to overemphasize that aspect of our life in this house—it's solidly built, it perches firmly on its slope—but nonetheless, every day inside it has a whiff of adventure. Sometimes it can make you crazy, as when the largest of our resident geckos peed on the adapter to my computer and fried it to hell. Nor was I thrilled to find a scorpion lounging below the baby's bath toys one night in the tub.

Still, I've had dreams in this house about disaster, earthquake and fire. It's my subconscious letting me know it thinks I'm at greater risk because we're less visibly protected than we've ever been. The walls, when they exist, are made of slats of bamboo or canvas. Thunderstorms shake the structure from roof to floor. When visitors first see our place, they're amazed at the soaring ceilings and its resemblance to Sydney Opera House, just roofed in along along. But then they glance around and say, 'But you're so exposed.' At first it alarmed me, but now I think, so we're exposed. And so what? Our bamboo nest has introduced me to a central fact of existence more beautifully and concretely than I would ever have expected. We are all, at this vulnerable juncture, exposed because of what's happening to the planet's atmosphere. We are all going to have to face that and make our adaptations or have them thrust upon us. We will need to develop more resilient, nuanced and, yes, more open relationships with the elements, animals, and people who surround us to withstand changes already in motion.

This is difficult knowledge, but I wouldn't trade it for anything and not only because I'm in slightly better alignment with the natural processes around me. It's also partly because these experiences have enlarged the world of my stories. I lost the computer, but the expression on the



repairman's face as I told him what happened was priceless. My thumb received a welt, but I didn't miss the fierce beauty in the curve of that scorpion's raised tail. Yes, it's easier to embrace something beautiful, like the traveling circus of bats careening through the house at twilight and the breath of wind around my ankles as I make my morning coffee. Still, this wild new notion of shelter is fostering in us all a suppleness of being.

I think the secret lies within the fiber of the house itself. Mostly, it is built from bamboo, which was the only plant to survive the catastrophe of Hiroshima, a sad but elegant way to convey its stubborn adaptability. Unlike hardwood, bamboo's exterior is soft and its core is firm. I like the imagery: be receptive to new influence and willing to bend; yet know your limits and maintain clarity about your deep self. Bamboo embodies a subtle blend of determination with malleability, a useful quality in a world that will more and more demand just that kind of intelligent flexibility.

No one knows the origin of the word, but one explanation carries lovely, poetic resonance: when the plant is burned, it pops with a powerful crack, a bam, followed by another splinter of noise, a boo. My house, built of bamboo that's been split, curved, smoked, and sliced, has definitively cracked wide my notion of what constitutes shelter, protection, and home.

But it's more than that, too: our house has brought me closer to people and creatures that have always surrounded me – I just feel more responsible for my neighbors now. What touches them touches me, a relationship of mutual influence. Say the words 'global warming' and watch despair rise like an ugly tide in a room. But what I'm feeling here in Bali, in a small patch of jungle bound by rice fields, river, and a large and busy road, is energized. When you're lucky enough to watch blue butterflies travel the length of your living room, you'll do almost anything to ensure the preservation of that gorgeous, fragile dance of dust and color. *