

Labour of Love

Text & Images / Michael Paul



There are two types of people in this world: those who accept the status quo and those who bend reality to their own vision. Hong Kong-based interior designer Marcus Foley and his partner Irene Capriz are definitively the latter.

Brought up with that compelling Australian can-do attitude, Foley doesn't take no for an answer. Case in point: 'People told me I was completely nuts to try to ship an old plantation house from Borneo to Bali and shoehorn it into an odd-shaped plot of land,' he recalls. 'But I pooh-poohed the sceptics and went right ahead.' The result is a magical holiday retreat that marries a modern-style pavilion with a colonial plantation house built in 1880.

The story began when Foley and Capriz bought land in Bali after patiently waiting for the right property to come on the market. A modern rebuild was out of the question, so when Foley discovered the old colonial house in Kalimantan he had one of those eureka moments. The deal was done and bit by bit the 15x15-metre house was dismantled and shipped by land and sea on 12 large trucks to be re-assembled in Bali.

While it was still on the high seas, Foley began drawing up the plans and setting the canvas. 'This enabled me to see just how it would fit into the land and work out the spatial relationships between the old house, the planned new pavilion and the biggest pool possible,' he explains. Through skilful planning, he achieved the ideal orchestration of geometry — perfect proportions between the old and new structures — for the 1200-square-metre site.

The construction challenges were mind-boggling. Skilled Javanese artisans were recruited and

camped on the site from the outset. Painstakingly, board by board — each one numbered — the house was put back together. The land had been a rice paddy for hundreds of years, so the foundations had to be sunk down some 15 metres and an iron grid set on concrete piles to create a platform. 'All along, we had to find compromises between modern construction techniques while working with old-style craftspeople,' explains Foley. 'Only recycled timbers were used — no easy task as the house was made entirely from okan or Borneo ironwood, the toughest wood anywhere.'

One of the main challenges was introducing modern amenities while preserving the core integrity and architectural heritage: the mechanics, electrics and plumbing, which include air conditioning, bathrooms, kitchens and other fundamentals. Even a water and sewage treatment system had to be custom-made. For many, these would have been insurmountable challenges, but Foley and Capriz took everything in stride with the help of expert contractors.

When it came to designing the interior, a passion for detail bordered on the obsessive. Fortunately, Foley and Capriz share similar tastes, so together they considered every aspect of the decoration and furniture, achieving an intriguing balance of retro, ethnic and modern. 'We were careful not to introduce too many Balinese pieces,' explains Capriz. 'We wanted to keep the colonial origins while avoiding overkill on the ethnic look.' Traditional techniques were used for painting the woodwork and walls, and Capriz chose classic Indonesian colours, which she contrasted in a contemporary style. After months of meticulous work Villa 1880 is today a tribute to the couple's taste, determination and passion for perfection.

Previous page: This old Borneo plantation house built in 1880 has been married to a modern-style pavilion furnished with retro pieces. Architect-owner Marcus Foley carefully planned the layout to ensure the ideal spatial proportions with the old building and the largest possible pool in the space available

This page: The contemporary pavilion was not without its construction challenges. Careful consideration had to be given to the load-bearing capacity to allow a terrace for entertaining to be built on the roof, which also holds large planter pots and a stone deck





The comfortable seating area in the pavilion is furnished with stylish retro-style pieces like the Italian Colony armchairs from Miniforms or the Italian Servomuto table lamps. The wall lamps are by Lux Lumina



Large antique wooden bowls from Java filled with tropical fruit decorate the long dining table with its retro style Re-Trouve chairs by Patricia Urquiola for EMU. The hanging ceiling lamps are ceramic mercury pots salvaged from a shipwreck



1950s Italian bar stools surround the modern outdoor kitchen while an antique cabinet behind holds a selection of old Chinese and Balinese ceramic pieces



Treasures abound in the eclectic, colourful media room. A vintage Paolo Piva coffee table from B&B Italia displays antique yellow salt pots adorned with tropical flowers. The custom sofa is covered in a bold Enzo degli Angiuoni fabric, while the vintage La Riposante armchair has been re-upholstered in velvet. The vintage wall lamps are by Sergio Mazza



Fun papier-mâché animal heads like this zebra adorn the wall of the bunk



The playful bunk room is designed to sleep six children. Resident designer Irene Capriz chose traditional Indonesian paint colours for the doors that lead to the media room



This page: The basin and vanity area in the attic bathroom has been adapted to work in a vintage Balinese table. The blue fish-scale tiles on the shower room wall were designed by Foley

Facing page: The comfortable retro-style bed in the attic bedroom fits in with the colonial interior. The wardrobes with their unique brass handles were designed by Foley, while the hanging vintage lamps were sourced from antique shops in Bali and Italy

