



Cultural Saviours

Story by Hanna Rodian

Two Famous Australians in Indonesia, Michael White, aka Made Wijaya, and Warwick Purser have been largely responsible for the way Bali and all things Balinese are regarded around the world.

Warwick and Lisa Purser first came to Bali on their honeymoon in 1968 and stayed at the legendary Tandang Sari in Sanur, the island's first 'boutique' hotel. Fulfilling a childhood dream of living somewhere 'exotic,' Warwick and his wife fell in love with their newly discovered paradise and kept extending their stay. When the owner of the hotel realised that the Pursers were finding it impossible to leave, he asked Warwick if he would consider staying on as manager. Warwick agreed, cancelled his flight back to the UK where he was due to begin a top advertising job, and the Pursers made Bali their permanent home.

In the 1970's Tandang Sari attracted a globe-trotting crowd that included Rothschilds, Rockefellers and many other famous guests. This group did have one thing in common - they were all trying to discover the romantic and mysterious 'Bali' that the island conjured up in their imaginations, while also searching for deeper cultural understanding.

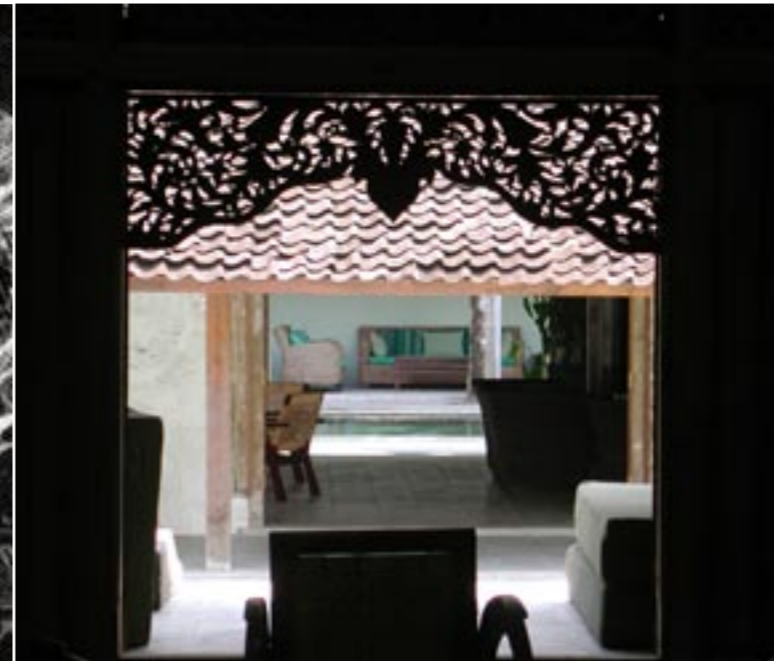
To cater to the needs of his high-maintenance guests, Warwick hired, and personally trained, university students as guides; teaching them to develop a 'sensitive, discerning and appreciative approach to tourism. His original travel company Pacto later

became Indonesia's largest tour operator, and today's guides still wear the same uniform that Warwick designed 35 years ago!

Together with the owners of Tandang Sari, Warwick created a foundation to fund cultural performances and teach Balinese dancing to future generations. His aim was to preserve or even 're-invent' artistic and cultural traditions that could have been lost forever, at the same time trying to maintain a standard that even the most critical Balinese audiences could accept and enjoy.

A few years later, Warwick left Indonesia when the government stopped allowing foreigners to own companies connected with the tourism industry. He moved to Vanuatu, where he became the Director General of Tourism. Promoting village handicrafts as well as tourism, he grew to realise the potential for future business ventures back in his beloved Bali.

Michael White, an architectural student who dropped out of university in Sydney had to abandon ship and swim ashore



*Previous page: Made's original house
This page, from top to bottom:
Warwick's 'Tembi'; Made's first garden
in Bali designed by Geoffrey Bawa;
and Warwick's house and pool*

when he first arrived in Bali during a bad storm in 1974. He too fell in love with the island, and finding a home with a high-caste Brahman family who adopted him, he changed his name to Made Wijaya. In the seven years he lived with them, they taught him not only to speak Bali Halus, the language reserved for high caste families, but he was able to learn more about the intricacies of Balinese daily and ceremonial life than any other foreigner on the island.

In the 70s, Warwick and Made were briefly introduced in Australia by the Mullers; artist and socialite Carole, and her husband Peter, an architect who created a totally new style of hotel design - Bali village meets luxury hideaway - for the Bali Oberoi and Amandari hotels, styles that would later be imitated all over the world.

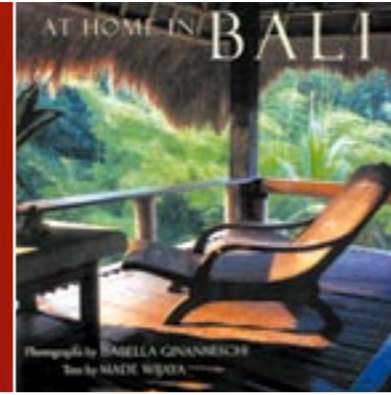
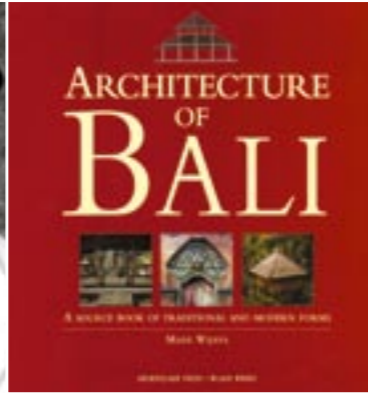
When Made was still struggling to earn his way as a tennis coach and English teacher, Warwick was an established member of the Balinese community, living on the illustrious Batu Jimbar estate, a group of beautiful seaside villas built by artist Donald Friend and architect Geoffrey Bawa in Sanur. In 1978, he asked Made to design his garden for him. Made was very interested but had no experience in tropical gardening, so he asked a Balinese friend and experienced rice farmer to help. Together they established a small garden landscape company named Swastika Kebun.

In the 1930's, many famous European artists like Hans Snel, Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies lived happily in Camphuan on the outskirts of Ubud under the patronage of the Pita Maha Artists' Foundation. The 'Sanur crowd' gradually moved up to Ubud and carried on the tradition into the 1970's. According to Made, Warwick built what he describes as 'the most stylish mini-palace in Bali.' The Mullers' took over and completely renovated Rudolf Bonnet's former studio next door, and Swastika Kebun was called in to landscape both gardens.

Another group of artists and intellectuals built homes on the Sayan Ridge further out of Ubud, overlooking the Ayung River gorge. In 1980, Made contracted the land that previously belonged to the author Colin McPhee, and built Taman Bebek, his new home, as a series of tropical 'cosy cottages' with a colonial feel and spectacular views.

Although Made and his Balinese 'commando squad' of gardeners experimented and muddled through at first, Swastika Kebun was given important landscaping commissions for the Bali Hyatt and Peter Muller's Bali Oberoi in the early 1980's. Made later realised that if he turned Taman Bebek into a small hotel, it could also appeal to the big names in the music business who stayed at Tandang Sari - Mick Jagger had 'married' Jerry Hall on the beach there, and in 1987, Taman Bebek became a popular hotel with the jet set after David Bowie visited on his honeymoon.

Clockwise from top left: Made at 50; two of Made's coffee table books; by the pool at Villa Bebek; and a younger Made with his 'commando squad' of gardeners



In 1995, Warwick, who had been developing a handicraft business in northern Thailand, was asked by Habitat, his first important client, to return to Indonesia and explore possibilities there. Moving back to Bali for a short time, he soon realised that the handicraft skills in the Yogyakarta area of Central Java could be better adapted to manufacture the products he had in mind.

Leasing an Art Deco 'palace' in the centre of Yogyakarta's antique district, Warwick founded the company Out of Asia. When looking for a more traditional backdrop to compliment his products, he located Tembi, a small Javanese village just outside Yogyakarta. Tembi became both his home and office, and renovation and conservation work was undertaken. Friends contracted houses in the compound, and he established a foundation to fund health projects, and schools teaching music and swimming.

Out of Asia has developed into the most successful homeware and handicrafts export company in Indonesia, employing a permanent staff of 400. Another 5,000 craftspeople produce more than 28,000 sleek, elegant designs in the villages of Central Java, Bali and Lombok for companies as varied as Ralph Lauren, Harrods and Target.

So many friends, clients and important guests stay in the village, that Warwick plans to refurbish two of the traditional houses in the compound and turn them into a special small hotel, and the huge 150-year old *joglo* (a Javanese traditional wooden house) will become a very special restaurant before the end of this year!

Made is still living at the beautiful, rambling Villa Bebek in Sanur, which functions both as his home and office. His workforce, employed in his publishing, interior design and garden architecture divisions, has grown to more than 450. He has a foundation that supports juniors who go on to play in the Indonesian tennis team, and also religiously attends and reports on important ceremonies held all over Bali, usually with a large group of friends, clients or journalists in tow.

As an acclaimed author, Made has written numerous books about his first years on the island, as well as Balinese architecture, interior design and tropical gardening. Published four times a year, his very own *Poleng* magazine features his travels, cultural life, and the latest gossip in the expat community. The 'Stranger in Paradise' column he writes every month for *Hello Bali* magazine helps to give visitors to the island a glimpse of Balinese traditions and cultural life.

Made and Warwick both travel a great deal, but they each experience a shiver of anticipation on arriving home, and heave a sigh of relief when the wooden gates at Tembi and Villa Bebek close behind them. Successful businessmen who help and support a large number of people, they are also cultural ambassadors whose adopted culture receives their full support. 🌿



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