GATEWAY TO THE MORNING OF THE WORLD

Deceptively simple, elegantly constructed and breathtakingly located, Rahul and Indrakshi Mookerjee’s home in Bali, designed by architect Ernesto Bedmar, has been furnished by the island’s best accessory—its stupendous views.

Writer Rahul Jacob. Photographer Albert Lim.
The sparsely furnished living pavilion features an eight-seater sofa. The columns supporting the pavilion are reclaimed ironwood pillars that used to support piers.
The comfortably furnished library pavilion looks out to the ocean.
One of the four guest bedrooms with an en-suite garden.

In-house style

Views from the main dining table. One of the indoor-outdoor guest bathrooms.

PHOTO: Djuna Ivereigh

PRIVATE GARDEN
One of the four guest bedrooms with an en-suite garden.
When the Argentinian architect Ernesto Bedmar was commissioned to design Jiva Puri in Bali, he was overcome by “a strong feeling of insecurity” because of the blessed island’s own traditions of temple, elegance and airy architecture. He had received so much inspiration from the local aesthetic that he’d put those traditions to work in projects around the world over two decades. The Argentinian felt there was little he could add to the Balinese style. Jiva Puri was the first commission the well-known, Singapore-based architect received in Bali. In the end, the stunning vistas from the property and Bedmar’s wealth of experience gave him the confidence to start work on the project. In Jiva Puri Villa, a recent book on the house, he thanks the villa’s owner for his confidence in allowing him “to build a simple environment” for the holiday home.

There is an innate modesty in such commutes, which was echoed by its owner, Rahul Mookerjee, when I interviewed him briefly for this article. Mookerjee declined to speak about the house at length or of his motivation behind building it because he felt an article about the holiday home for AD should, first and foremost, be about the architect and the house itself.

NATURAL MINIMALISM

Such modesty should not be mistaken for an absence of audacious ambition. Bedmar has taken the precepts of Balinese architecture—its giant entrance gates and its compounds designed around the centrality of a courtyard—and updated them for the 21st century. I can think of few architects working in Asia—other than the late Sri Lankan genius Geoffrey Bawa, and his successors such as Channa Devali—who can reconcile classical and hierarchic traditions while somehow rewriting the rules comprehensively.

To begin at the beginning: There is that gargantuan gate and long compound walls on a rock to Balinese tradition and then another one that reveals a narrow path running alongside an elegant lawn that could double as a tennis court, and a linear pond that is very Bawa-esque. There are only—only—frangipani trees lining the lawn. The lack of flower beds is a relief because they would have somehow rewritten the rules comprehensively. The lengthy pool with a floor of natural stone, for instance, takes the incomparable description because it is so true—there are few places that could add to the traditions he revered, has succeeded so extravagantly that he has won three new commissions on the island since Jiva Puri was built. In the preface to the coffee-table book celebrating the architecture of Jiva Puri, Bedmar thanks “the gods and spirits of Bali” for the new commissions. As for Mookerjee, at a recent party I spotted him dancing with his elegant, 70-something mother amid those formidable pillars from the temple set on the rocks.

SPIRITUAL LEANINGS

To the right is a temple—there must always be a temple in view in a Balinese landscape—but this one is extraordinary because it is black, set on black rocks by the sea, and more than just a little brooding. When I walked down to it one evening, I imagined that the waves crashing against it for many millennia had still not washed away a deviant tendency towards paganism. The living area with these beguiling views is such a natural place to gravitate to that it is always hard to pinpoint when dinner parties begin and when they end. The furniture in the living and dining pavilions is spare, but grand. Designed by Bedmar’s architectural firm, Bedmar & Shi Designers, the eight-seater sofa reminded me of the minimal lines of B&B Italia, somehow made suitable for the languid tropics. It faces directly towards the daily drama of the sunset, and as often as not, the melodramatic storytelling of Indrakshi Mookerjee, the owner’s vivacious and humorous wife. The columns that support the huge pavilion look like they could support a temple three times as large.

What the temple of Jiva Puri celebrates aside from Bali itself is food. A former chef from the Grand Hyatt is often in residence to cook sumptuous meals. If this weren’t enough, on my last visit, Mookerjee’s other product a Bengali feast of such authenticity that I raved the fridge the following day for leftovers. A seven- metre-long distressed-wood dining table sets the scene perfectly. Above it hang suitably giant lanterns, fashioned remarkably from shrimp traps from the nearby island of Lombok.

PARADISE FOUND

People from around the world have been falling in love with Bali for almost a century. In the 1890s, the island bewitched legends in their own lifetimes; German artist, Walter Spies and the Canadian musicologist, Colin McPhee. Spies’ home, facing Mount Agung, is one of the most special villas in east Bali. The homes they built became much more than four walls and a roof, running into a long-winded tale of self-discovery and achievement. Jiva Puri is the summit of a similar journey, although because the 21st century is an easier time to make such dreams a reality, it was not as arduous as that faced by foreigners who lived in Bali almost a century ago. Taking a break after 25 years in banking, Bedmar was commissioned to design Jiva Puri with the attention to detail and foresight that would make a bartender envious.

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