



Creation of a Luxury Home in Kerala, South India

Indian Summer House

To: Mini

See reply from architect. I am a little excited by this but it may turn out to be too much money.

From: Donald

Returning to India for the first time after we were married some years earlier and staying in the quaint upstairs room, built as a honeymoon suite for Mini's parents, we could not imagine this not being part of our lives. We were sleeping on two mismatched, art deco single beds, made by two different carpenters at two different times. The mattresses were cotton filled eiderdowns that were rolled out over the cane mesh frame and the sheets were either bold print western style or more traditional Indian cheesecloth. It was on one of those beds Mini was born.

This is now the location of our Indian Summer House formerly Mukulath House. Mukulath means fearlessness and to show many signs of independence. We feel we have created a holiday destination that respects that strong heritage, blends it with comfort and warmth, designed to ensure our visitors truly enjoy a mostly undiscovered part of India.

The idea to build grew from a trip we took to India with some friends and our children. We toured through northern India admiring many grand palaces with a final stop to visit Kerala and Mini's home in Muvattapuzha. While visiting the property one friend immediately said, "you have to build something..." Easier said than done in a State where everyone has an MBA, undervalued construction skills, monsoonal climate, an elected communist government and multi layers of bureaucracy!

In our dreams we had grand memories of Mini's father's home, Kalathoor, now featured in a famous Malayalam movie, with its cool verandas that gave shelter from the heat. We were after the same with some modern additions, big fans everywhere, comfy beds and some privacy.

One evening after seeing Slumdog Millionaire at the Nova Carlton we wandered into Borders Book Store (now home of Brunetti's and our project manager Faizal's favourite coffee shop when in Melbourne -that's another story). Mini headed for the fiction section and I the magazine selection. I pulled out Architectural Digest August 2008 (a magazine I didn't know existed or really cared about) and there was an article about a lovely home in India that had been worked on by a Made Wijaya. ...this started a series of events that lead to our Indian Summer House.

Rather than spending precious time researching this man I just emailed him:

From: Don

To: Made Wijaya

Hello, We have some family property in tropical Kerala in India and have seen your Mumbai house in architectural digest recently. We would like to know if you can assist us in building something similar perhaps on a smaller scale on our property. Please let me know or alternatively if you have additional contacts who maybe able to assist me with design I would be most appreciative. Kind regards Don Van De Pol

From: Made Wijaya

To: Don

We would love to help ! I am in Kerala every second month (working on one house near Trivandrum and one hotel, near Fort Bekal). Attached photos of a smaller version of the Alibagh house we just completed in Bali.

From: Don

To: Mini

See reply from architect. I am a little excited by this but it may turn out to be too much money.

This is the best description I have been able to find of Made Wijaya taken from Man's World January 2005 Great Man of the Gardens *"Walking back to the car park, I watch the gardens being slowly coaxed into the shapes that Made can see in his mind. Weeks of research, scores of emails and finally a hurried lunch later, I am no wiser about the person that has created so much beauty along with so much controversy. 'A man people love to hate' is one of the descriptions one hears about him. "I am just a garden artist, a retired dancer, a writer, a photographer and an architect," he tells me describing himself."*

Although Made now lives and works in Bali he has a bachelor pad located at stunning Lavender Bay just over the Sydney Harbour Bridge where we finally met. Made prepared a lovely summer lunch: some prawns, boiled eggs, smoked salmon, tomato and bocconcini salad, bread and a glass of Pinot Grigio. On a beautiful Sydney afternoon with the windows open and a view to the bridge we were interviewed. He asked us about our families, about Mini and I and our boys, our parents. He was taking an interest. Mini talked about her family and the plot of land, how we wanted something tropical,

suitable for our family to live together in but have their own space. Privacy from drop-ins but inclusive for guests –our new family home!

Made is charismatic, charming and can be a little naughty. We liked him a lot but we came away nervous and excited about this new adventure –something much bigger than both of us, something that our project manager Faizal reminds us of every visit. It turns out the questions he asked and how we answered them became the fabric of our new home.

With no preconceived idea of Made's plans for us, a sketchy concept drawing was prepared. A collection of rooms inspired from old Kerala homes connected by a palatial covered walkway. Separate rooms for different functions. The Main House with its Salon and Master Bedroom, The Children's Wing, The Western Kitchen, The Staff Quarters, The Guest House, affectionately known as Raj Bhavan. The Ancestral Home (now beautifully restored) contains the Honeymoon Suite, Gym and Ayurveda Spa, The Garage, The Laundry, The Asian Kitchen, The Organic Garden, The Pool Pavilion, The Temple inspired Entrance Pavilion, The Entrance Gate, The Guard House, The Service Block, The Water Tower, The Pool, The Powder Room off the Western Kitchen and the all important Asian Kitchen. It was all much bigger and bolder than we had initially anticipated.

This is the end of 2008, we are on cusp of the global financial crisis, exchange rates were not favourable. The project was shelved. Almost relieved that this mad capped, irrational decision was taken out of our hands we went back to our busy lives.

It's not until 16 April 2010 that we met with Fabis Interior Architects Pvt Ltd and signed an MOU. Made had mentioned Rosemary and Faizal but he hadn't worked with them before. An interesting couple. Rosemary, Italian by origin but Australian has lived and worked in India for many years met Faizal, a Malayalee from Quilon from a family of engineers and timber merchants. They seemed to have it all covered.

We received an email from Rosemary Dibenedetto:

From: rosemary dibenedetto

Dear Mini and Don, Faizal and I are in Melbourne at present and are just touching base to say hello. If you would like to meet with us, we are most happy to do so. Best regards, Rosemary FABIS Fab Interior Architecture Pvt. Ltd.

We met them at Rose Bar in North Melbourne in Errol Street. It's a cute little bar with a very cool cocktail list. This was fairly culturally insensitive as Faizal is Muslim and doesn't drink however Rosemary was very happy to have a glass of wine. So we spent a little time getting to know each other and planned a second meeting. Our second meeting was at our then home in Ascot Vale. They had been to Brunettis and picked up some of Rosemary's favourite cakes, we had tea and Faizal talked. Discussions ensued and they

had brought with them an MOU all ready to be signed. Faizal went through the details of the MOU, Mini picked up a pen and signed and then I co-signed right there and then. Who would have thought that was going to happen on a Saturday morning in Ascot Vale?

Did they really know what they were getting themselves into? Did we? A couple of inexperienced kids with a bit of a dream, a crazy Aussie who had fallen in love with Bali cum tennis coach cum landscape artist cum exotic dancer in charge of architecture and landscape design.

Of course that is history now and today we have a luxurious home that we share with family, friends and intrepid travellers looking for a new way to discover a place and its people. The reason this home feels so special is the stories that surrounds the inception and construction of the home. The many talented artisans and literally hundreds of local and not so local employees that have worked on the home as well as the local extended family who have embraced our Indian Summer House. Come and see it for yourself ... for a night, a week, even a month. We hope to make your trip that once-in-a-lifetime experience.

www.indiansummerhouse.co

facebook indian summer house

instagram indiansummerhouse

Tripadvisor Indian Summer House