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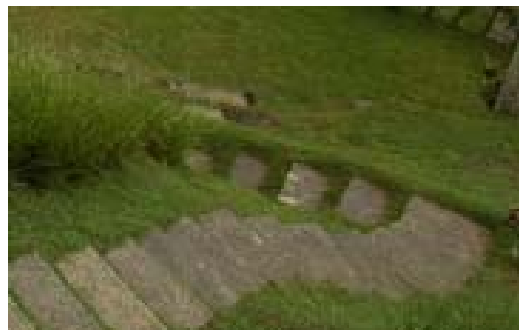


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BALI An Ancient
Cloud of
Blue

By Molly F. McGill



Atop a ridge in Bali's Ubud, 580 metres above sea level, stretches a villa whose Indonesian name, Awan Biru, aptly means "blue cloud".



Winding along a narrow road to the Ubud highlands - proceeding up through rice paddies and small villages, distracted by all the local colour, wide-eyed yet calmed by the scenic surrounds - you seem to forget that you have a destination at all. The road describes hairpin turn after turn on its way up till you finally encounter a long driveway edged by a vegetable garden leading to Awan Biru.

As you pull into the carpark and step from the vehicle, the cool air at 580 metres makes a refreshing welcome. Smiling staff welcome you with fruity concoctions before whisking your bags into the villa. In front of you, Villa Awan Biru stretches atop a hillside. A deep valley plunges towards a trickling stream and then

climbs back up the other side where, on a clear day, you can see the distant mountains of Abang, Batur Caldera, Batu Karu, Bratan and Agung, Bali's own powerful protector. It was this juxtaposition of rice paddies, valleys, streams, forests, mountains and volcanoes that first drew the owners to this spot.

The villa has a mystical vibe of its own. Objects on display emanate an ancient energy, whispering their respective histories as you pass by. The owners, an art historian and an archaeologist, have decorated the villa with both ancient and modern objects collected throughout Indonesia. The most striking of these appears immediately as you descend the stairs toward the main house - three buffalo skulls, "a traditional decoration of Sulawesi Toraja houses and a sign of the

Villa Awan Biru is peppered with both ancient and contemporary art pieces collected from the owners' Indonesian travels, including a



pair of terracotta Toraja ancestors from Sulawesi and, from Sumba, a “nenek moyang” stone stela with the figure of an ancestor on top.



welfare of the owner". Included in the more than 60 objects on display are a couple of articulated statuettes and a wooden carved ceremonial stick from Borneo/ Kalimantan, an antique wooden horse from Timor, two Toradja painted wooden panels from Sulawesi, three painted panels with Ramayana *wayang kullit* figures from Java, and a *penji* (stone funerary stela) with fish motif from Sumba.

Designed by architect Jonathan Victor and Devisanti Tunas, this villa, as requested by the Belgium owners, was created with minimal environmental impact. The multi-structure home has five bedrooms including one master bedroom and four guest bedrooms (two of which are twin rooms) spread throughout, optimizing the stunning views from private terraces and affording privacy to those who seek it. Each comes with its own luxurious en-suite bathroom; some feature open-air rain showers or volcanic stone bathtubs. A large living room with canopy view, a study, a gym with



A strategically staggered layout allows for panoramic views of the lush landscape below and beyond, while maintaining privacy and permitting secluded moments of splendour.



From the top of the “*kulkul*”, or traditional village sentinel tower, and on a clear day, one can see Batu Karu and Mount Bratan to the West, the ridge of Mount Batur Caldera to the Northeast, and Mount Agung's striking silhouette across the valley.



floor-to-ceiling windows, and a spa offer numerous retreats. There are also two kitchens and staff quarters.

The home centres around a large infinity-edge swimming pool with Jacuzzi and a second plunge pool, all of them filled with warm water. A fully stocked poolside bar featuring a Sulawesi gong and lounge chairs overlooks the unspoiled scenery.

Steps lead from the sundeck into the valley below. Halfway down, a small meditation *bale* provides opportunity to centre your thoughts, inviting surrender to the energy of the place. Continuing down into the valley, the steps lead to a small deck that juts out over the stream. The sound of flowing water combined with the

beauty of the area conjures that magical Bali spell.

Up above, an open-air pavilion provides a communal gathering point for guests. Three *wayang kulit*, or leather puppets from Bali (these represent Layak, Arjuna and Hanuman) sit akimbo while guests dine to the symphonic sounds of nature and the bubbling, lily-filled water features. A *kulkul* (tower) offers aerial views nearby; it stands like a guardian, its carved wooden door decorated with figures symbolizing the upper world, the living world, and the netherworld. Lit softly, respectful of the elemental starlight, the villa glows at night with an unmatched ambiance.

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Mount Agung, Bali's powerful protector, can be seen off in the distance as the sun rises over the opposite ridge.