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The Allure of the Islands

BALINESE TOUCHES WARM
A PAVILION-STYLE RESIDENCE
ON HAWAII'S KONA COAST



"It's a contemporary blend of Hawaiian cottage style with Southeast Asian and Balinese influences," architect Mark de Reus says of the house he and designer Mary Philpotts McGrath built for a family on the Big Island of Hawaii. **THESE PAGES:** The residence's three pavilions overlook a cove on the North Kona Coast. Coral-stone columns support the roof of the living pavilion, center.

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Architecture by Mark de Reus, AIA, of Hart Howerton
Interior Design by Mary Philpotts McGrath, ASID/Landscape Architecture by
Anne Howerton, ASLA, of Hart Howerton, and David Y. Tamura, ASLA
Text by Patricia Leigh Brown/Photography by Mary E. Nichols

To Hawaiian elders, the phrase *ka no-hana lokahi* alludes to a profound connection to place. On the Kona Coast, the violent harshness of coal-black lava fields descending from volcanoes to the sea exerts a kind of gravitational emotional pull on those who live there. “We didn’t want to compete with the intimacy of lava, sea and sky,” says the owner of a tropical residence inspired by the cultures of the Pacific Rim. “This is a little bit of heaven that broke off onto the earth.”

Here, where Madame Pele,

the goddess of volcanoes, still resides, the elemental force of nature was the starting point for a family residence designed by architect Mark de Reus, then a principal at the San Francisco-based firm Hart Howerton. “Too many houses feel like you’re trespassing just by putting your feet in the front door,” says the husband. “We wanted this house to be happy, inviting and playful.”

The architect, who was born in Idaho and worked for a time in San Francisco, spent five years practicing in Jakarta before moving to the Big Island. His clients, a family from the

Bay Area, had traveled widely, scuba diving and sailing in the South Seas before deciding to build the residence—their first from scratch. The interior designer, Mary Philpotts McGrath, is based in Honolulu.

In the traditional architecture of Bali, they found the jubilant spirit they were looking for. “What’s fun in the tropics is blurring the distinction between inside and out, opening up the walls to live among the gardens,” explains de Reus, who drew upon an extensive retinue of Indonesian artisans. “Both the owners and I have a fondness for Balinese design. It



ABOVE: The living pavilion opens onto a garden. “It’s a gathering space that is comfortable and casual and is laced with vivid color,” Philpotts McGrath says. Lee Jofa solid-color sofa fabric and stripe. McGuire sofas and chairs. **LEFT:** Water spills from four pots in the reflecting pool, “providing the subtle sound of water and creating a sense of formality for the courtyard garden,” says de Reus.



ABOVE: In the dining room, the woven chairs, from PierceMartin, “have an informality that deliberately contrasts with the slab design of the teak table,” says de Reus. A circa 1920 *tansu* was split in two to form the long buffet. Topping it are Balinese temple candleholders and a water buffalo cowbell. Tapas from New Guinea hang on the wall. OPPOSITE ABOVE: Monkeypod cabinetry warms the kitchen.

RIGHT: Built-in beds on the guest cottage’s screen porch “offer overflow sleeping as well as a place for guests to gather,” says the designer. The golden-plaster walls, woven-mat ceiling, teak doors and hickory floors “serve as a rustic backdrop for the furnishings.”





was nice to be able to bring in their strong affection for that culture in a respectful way.”

The compound, which consists of three separate pavilions, is situated close enough to the ocean to feel the salt spray but also faces protectively inward toward a serene tropical garden, designed by landscape architects Anne Howerton and David Y. Tamura, and a reflecting pool. Although not a literal reproduction, it recalls the Balinese vernacular of thatched pavilions grouped around an inner courtyard, crafted out of natural materials like teak and bamboo and embellished with elaborate carvings.

It feels a bit like a travelogue come to life. Fans whir evocatively from ceilings, many of which are constructed with traditional bamboo matting and teak beams. Javanese coconut-palm columns rise languorously in the corners of the dining room. Cabinets in the master bath are hewn from lustrous tropical monkeypod wood, an exotic material “quite different from the nut bowls you get in the Philippines,” de Reus says wryly. Smooth exterior columns are cut from coral stone “to bring the coastline in,” he adds.

Along the residence’s craggy lava shoreline, white coral from the ocean is washed up

and strewn across the blackness—nature’s chic design touch. “When the sun comes up, the scattered coral becomes illuminated in flaming orange and red,” says the husband. “It’s our favorite time of day.”

The master bedroom is a tropical sanctum in which the man-made (a set of gold-leafed and intricately carved Balinese temple doors specially scaled for the residence) communes with the natural (an outdoor stone soaking tub made from a single piece of West Javanese river stone).

The palette of the plaster walls—salmon, celadon, creamy peach and gold—reflects the clients’ adven-

turous attitude. “One of the most interesting things about working with this couple is that they’re not afraid of color,” says Philpotts McGrath.

They were equally undaunted by furniture and objects of intriguing provenance—water-buffalo-hide lampshades, framed New Guinea bark cloth and even a green-lacquered antique Chinese opium bed converted into a low table. The designer recruited local artists like Yvonne Cheng, an Indonesian painter living in Hawaii. The imposing teak slab table in the dining room is Philpotts McGrath’s own design, inspired by a canoe. “We wanted to keep everything



OPPOSITE: The hand-carved doors de Reus designed for the den were inspired by the doors of Bali's Kingdom of Buleleng and Singaraja palaces. "Balinese doorways are such great celebrations of passage, of moving through a portal with a sense of discovery," he says.

very informal," she explains.

Carved fence-post figures from Borneo are placed throughout the property, appearing Zelig-like both indoors and out. "There's a sense of mystery and surprise everywhere," says the husband. "I think of these figures as a little troop of friends peering out of the lava."

The residence stretches along the ocean to a private cove, where it is possible to get up close and personal with whales and dolphins and manta rays. Surrounded by lava walls, the compound is approached through an open-air pavilion of cut lava stone embedded with a carved stone panel.

On the ocean side, a spa with an infinity-edge pool appears to hover between two lava formations, a sybaritic apparition that "feels like you're floating on the edge of the universe," the husband says. It is a felicitous spot for observing the stars, the island's exceptionally clear night skies having brought 13 major observatories to nearby 13,796-foot Mauna Kea.

The compound distills both the spirit of the South Pacific and the essence of its singular landscape. As the husband observes, with some awe: "Mark and Mary took our heartfelt sentiments about a place and made them real." □

ABOVE RIGHT: "The celadon-plaster walls lend a feeling of serenity to the master suite's sleeping area," says de Reus. Lee Jofa bed skirt fabric. Fabricut pillow and bolster fabric. **RIGHT:** The lanai. The landscaping was designed by Anne Howerton and David Y. Tamura.



