

BALÉ HIGH

John Hardy dreams up islands in the sun

By Carole Barrow

Bali, Indonesia's most celebrated island, is exotica exemplified. The entrancing rhythms of the gamelan, the intricate motifs of batik, and an aura of mystery have enticed many an adventurous foreigner to settle on its shores.

John Hardy, luxury jeweler and home designer, is one such trailblazer. In 1975, during a round-the-world voyage, the Canadian entrepreneur found his idyll and set up shop. He has called Bali home ever since.

Inspired by the exotic splendor of his adopted home and the customs and traditions of day-to-day life, Hardy began working with local artisans to translate his design vision into beautiful handmade jewelry and house wares intricately wrought in silver, gold, semi-precious and precious gems, and native black palmwood. Wanderlust also propelled John's wife, Cynthia, to Bali and they began working together in 1989.

"I wanted to use totally traditional Balinese crafts and re-invent them in a way that's useful, timeless and, paradoxically, modern at the

same time," says Hardy. In the past, Balinese kings maintained villages of metal-smiths to make everything from ceremonial offering bowls and dance ornaments to jewelry. Most of the artisans with whom Hardy works are descendants of those royal metal-smiths whose inherited memories of ancient traditions, uncommon skill and expert craftsmanship are lavished upon each item, imparting a strength, texture and integrity that machines simply cannot emulate.

"People can't believe my designs are not made by machines because they are so perfectly rendered. But because there are always certain tiny imperfections in

handwork, each piece is infused with a human energy, warmth that you can really feel, that you can't get from a machine-produced product. It's like the difference between a beautiful hand-woven garment and a machine-woven cloth — each piece has a 'hand.'" Utterly immersed in the culture, Hardy has been known to suspend his entire operation for native celebrations and rituals.

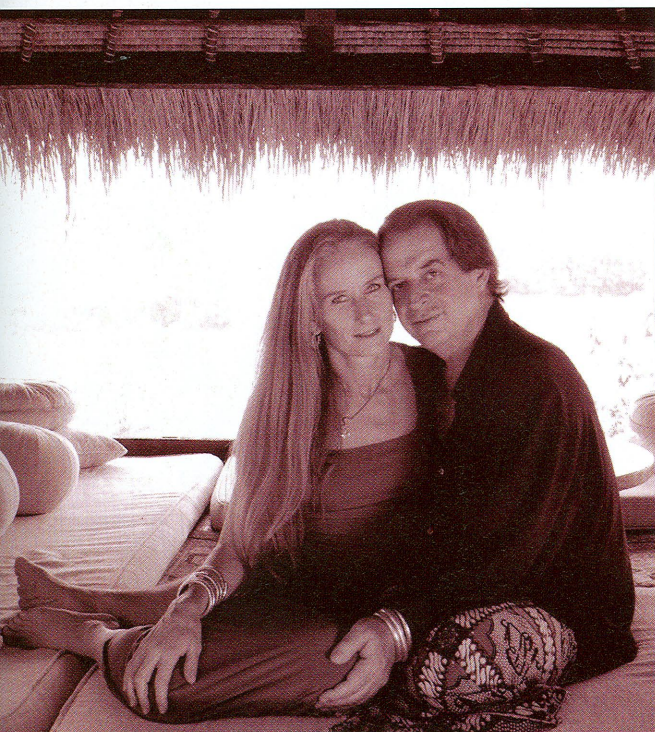
One of the traditional designs that most inspired Hardy was the Indonesian balé, an ancient tiki-hut shaped Hindu living quarter. Working with local artisans, Hardy decided to design his own version of the balé. This 13-foot-high, 10.5-foot-wide, open-sided pegged and grooved bamboo pavilion is the perfect place to retreat to. The simplistic design provides shelter while admitting air circulation through the open sides and naturally ventilated roof. The thatched roof is woven with bamboo and Alang-alang grass. "Bamboo is a sustainable resource," says Hardy, "That's why I love using it so much. It's like having an island in your back yard."

The gauzy cotton sheers that surround the balé can be tied back to allow cool breezes to flow through, or closed for privacy. Within the small but spacious structure are mattresses and pillows as well as a low serving table perfect for a refreshing cocktail, scented candle or bowl of fresh-picked mangos.

"The proportions of the balé — its distance above the ground, its shape and contours — are magical," marvels Hardy. "The dimensions are based on traditions that go back thousands of years."

The simple and time-tested design of the balé is said to impart a sense of serenity to all those who linger under its spell.

And in today's fast-paced world finding that special sanctuary, that secret, spot of daydreams and reverie, can be the ultimate luxury. □



Above: Designer John Hardy and his wife Cynthia. Opposite: One of his Indonesian balé tiki-huts.