



Villa Sungai's open-sided living pavilion overlooks a lap pool.

the villa people

Time to chill out in luxury villas in a **Balinese village**, where tranquillity and spirituality soothe the soul.

Text by Romaine Alwill. Photography by Romaine Alwill.

In Bali, the local men are given one of four first names: Wayan, Made, Nyoman and Ketut, from eldest to youngest respectively. So in theory, visitors know most people in Bali on a first-name basis. Perhaps this is why they develop an intimacy so quickly with the Balinese.

For Pamela and Alan Hayes, the people of Cepaka village, (20 minutes' north of Legian on the south-west Bali coast) welcomed them into their world five years ago – a world of ancient Bali.

Situated on a meandering river and surrounded by rice paddies, roosters and the ruddy faces of inquisitive schoolchildren, Villa Sungai and Villa Kembali (run by the Hayes as the Bali Luxury Villa Collection) are like hiding places. Accommodating up to 16 people across both, the villas are set up as a private retreat, with a five-star service and a very personal touch. Staffers Made, Ketut and Nyoman make visitors feel like royalty. Likewise, Pamela and Alan call them their "kings and queens". The success of the villas relies on this relationship.

Built and maintained with local materials, labour and traditional methods of construction, the villas have high-pitched thatch roofs, large terrazzo pavers and chunky, chalky-limed timbers, giving them a grand sense of scale. Tactile

soft furnishings and a soothing palette of colours make for an effortless and relaxed style. Mud-brick walls encase the open-air bathrooms and the airconditioned rooms are lavishly decorated, featuring four-poster beds.

The villas ooze a sense of space and calm. You can't help but switch off from the world of schedules and alarm clocks – except, however, for the roosters padding around in the leaf litter outside (and they don't have a snooze button!). They may be the only things that reluctantly prompt you to leave the sunlounges by the 17-metre lap pool overlooking the river to explore the local area. Visitors can hop into a chauffeured car to explore Tanah Lot (a Hindu temple set over water) and the Ubud region, Jimbaran Bay, Seminyak and Legian in comfort.

Seminyak and Legian, known for their homewares and fashion, are a playground for shoppers and bargain hunters. You'll need a discerning eye to sift through the stores and market stalls lining the streets if you are in search of a quality bargain. Retail shops often double as wholesale outlets, so for importers on a sourcing mission, Seminyak and Legian are a must.

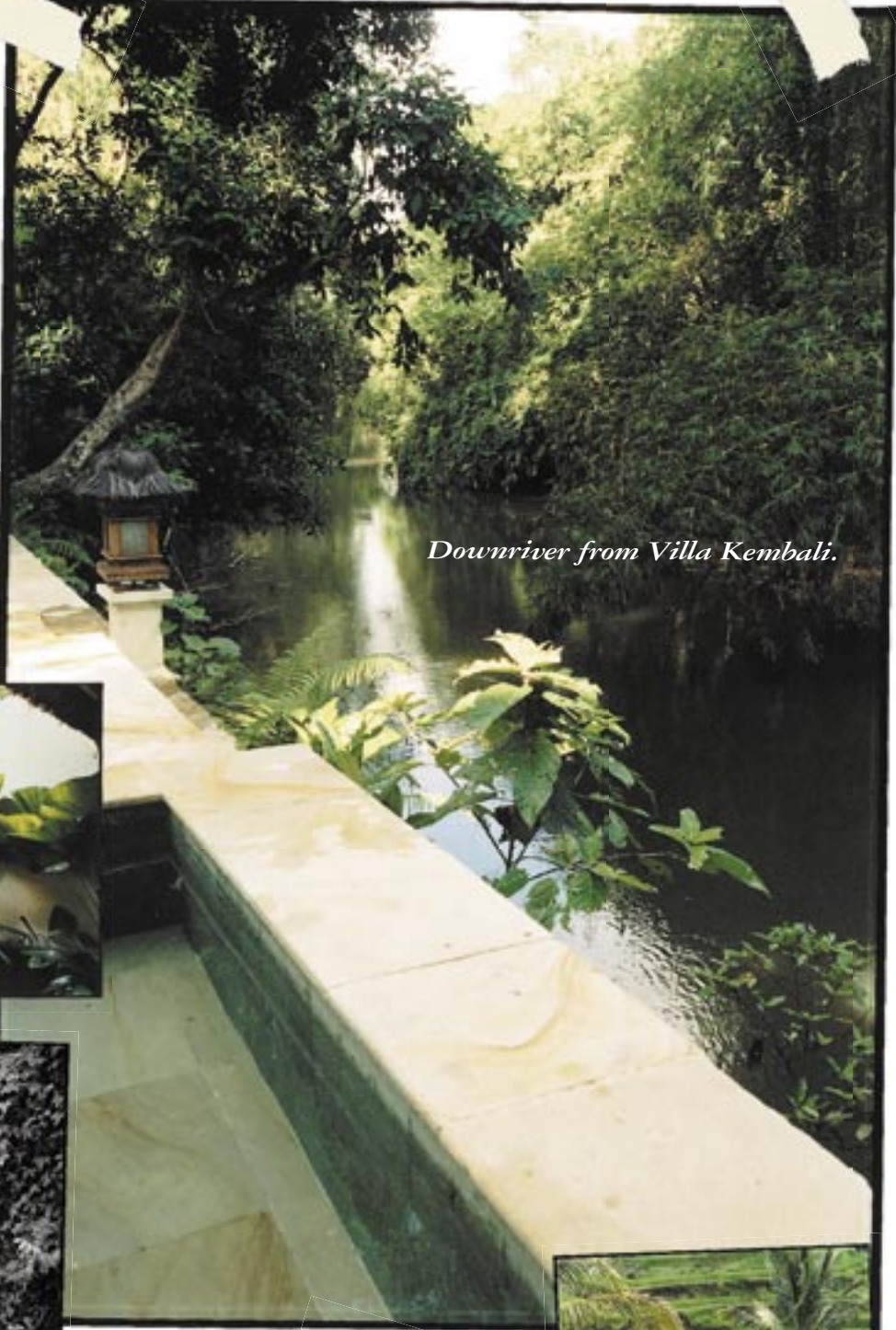
Around since the 1980s, antique shop Bali Gucci Gallery showcases a myriad styles from tribal Indonesian to Art Deco in furniture and textiles. At Kiata Kwanda >



Chalky walls, limed timbers and thatch on the roof express the villa's relaxed feel.

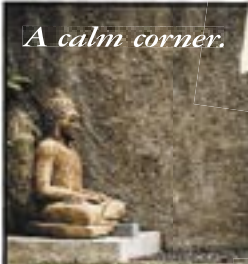


Visit sights by road.



Downriver from Villa Kembali.

A calm corner.



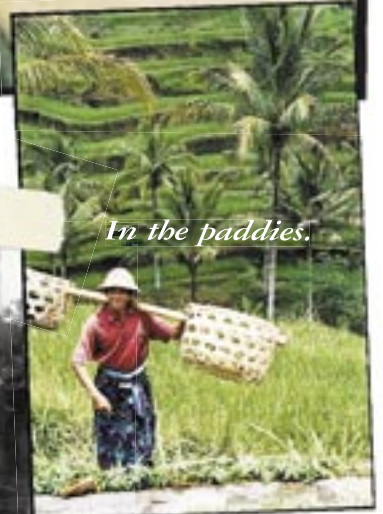
Open-air showers.



Local transport.

in Seminyak, black is the new black. Designing men and women's garments, it is Issey Miyake meets Costume Nationale, Bali style. Sunbebek is a collaboration between Frenchwoman Marie-Hélène Verlant and her Balinese partner. They produce homewares using locally produced ikat textiles to create a distinctly French/Balinese fusion. A standout newcomer is Crop – an innovative store with an extraordinary collection of contemporary jewellery (and look out for the exquisite tamarind wood stools).

Rich in religion, family values and culture but poor in infrastructure, Bali still has a welcoming feel. Even after the 2002 bombing, foreigners gravitate here, and not just because it is cheap. On many levels Bali is performing on a first-class world scale. In Ubud, Mozaic's French-Canadian chef Chris Salans puts on a modern fusion degustation menu. The 12 courses could include roasted lamb >



In the paddies.



Village home.



Cool retreat.



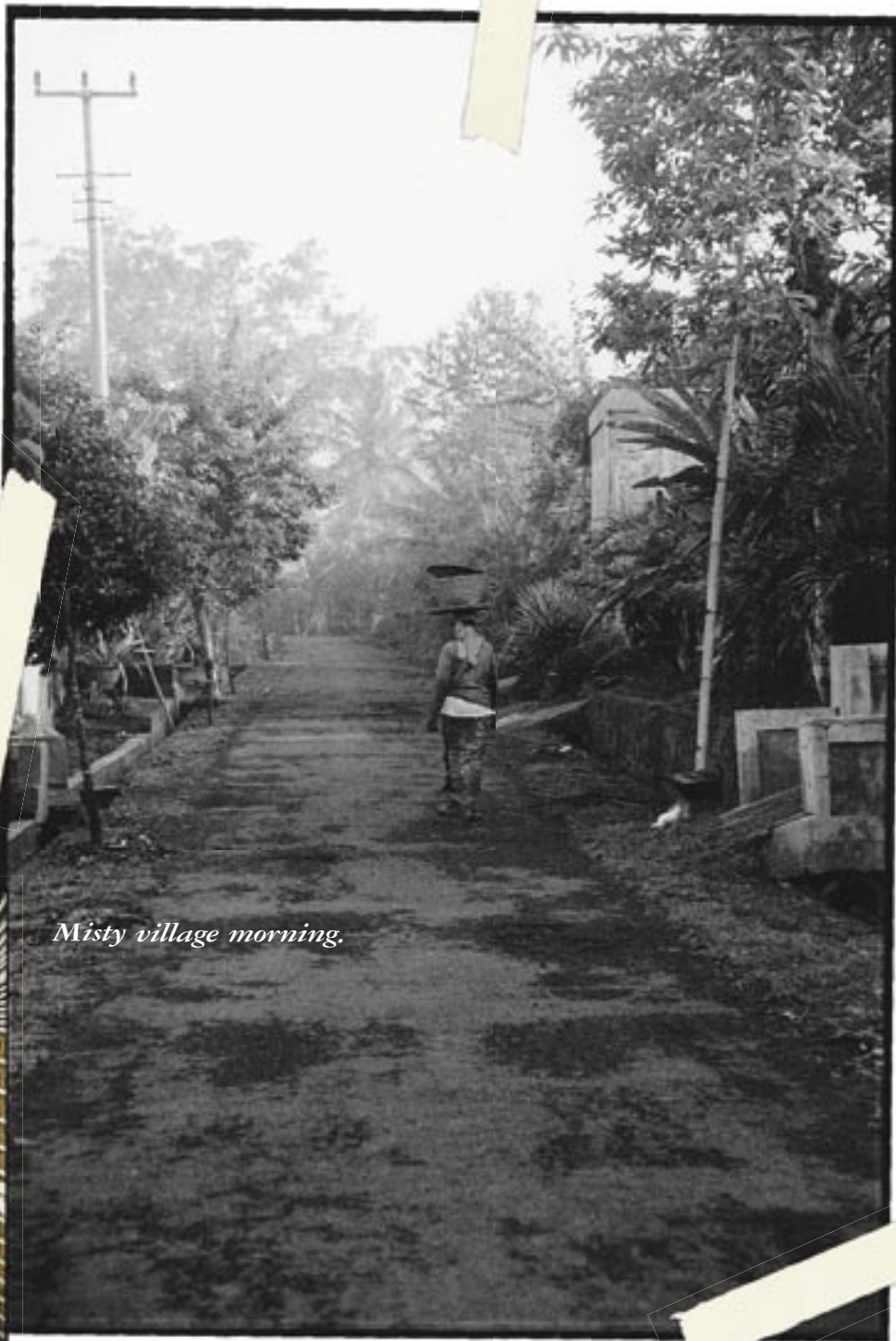
Dining at the Villa Sungai.



Perfect nap spot.



Cepaka village.



Misty village morning.

rack served on tender haricot vert and lima beans and Japanese edomame with Moroccan spices. Popular restaurants Ku Dé Ta and Gado Gado, both owned by Bali businessman Kadek Wiranatha (who also started Bali's first airline, Air Paradise), sit on exotic beach frontages. But for something different, head to ultra-cool sushi bar Wasabi. Tastefully decorated, this is the hottest place in town. For the best local food you can't beat Made's Warung on Jalan Raya Seminyak.

However, if you want to hibernate and be anonymous for a while, then it isn't hard to drum up an excuse not to leave the villas. With a masseuse and Pineapple Breeze drinks on call, it doesn't take long to feel recuperated. Within minutes of our arrival, Made, Ketut and Nyoman have memorised our names (generally more than four), made us welcome and affected us with the pace of their world – life by a slow, meandering river. □

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Stay Bali Luxury Villa Collection www.baliluxuryvillacollection.com

Sbob Bali Gucci Gallery Jalan Raya Basangkasa 4B, tel (+62 361) 730 046.

Kiata Kwanda Jalan Raya Seminyak 5C, tel (+62 361) 736 761 **Sunbek** Jalan Raya Seminyak 6, tel (+62 361) 732 715 **Crop** Jalan Basangkasa 88, Seminyak, tel (+62 361) 735 865.

Eat Ku Dé Ta Jalan Laksmana 9, Seminyak, Kuta, tel (+62 361) 736 969, or visit www.kudeta.net. **Gado Gado** Jalan Dhyana Pura 99, Seminyak, Kuta, tel (+62 361) 736 966. **Mozaic** Jalan Raya Sanggingan, Ubud, tel (+62 361) 975 768, or visit www.mozaic-bali.com. **Wasabi** Jalan Raya Basangkasa 47, Seminyak, tel (+62 361) 732 300. **Made's Warung** Jalan Raya Seminyak 78, tel (+62 361) 732 130.