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A SENSE OF PLACE

Alila Villas Uluwatu

FOR THE AWARD-WINNING DESIGNERS OF THIS BALI RESORT, LUXURY EQUATES TO ENJOYMENT OF NATURAL BEAUTY AND A SENSE OF PLACE. JANE GIFFORD SPOKE TO PROJECT ARCHITECT RICHARD HASSELL, CO-FOUNDER OF WOHA DESIGN FIRM.

High on a southern Bukit Peninsula cliff top in Bali, far from the usual tourist haunts and with forever views of the sea, perches the recently opened Alila Villas Uluwatu. This ecologically sustainable resort consists of a 50 suite hotel and 35 residential villas, all terraced with low-pitched volcanic pumice rock roof tops and blending almost seamlessly with the surrounding savannah landscape. For WOHA, the Singapore-based award-winning firm responsible for the design, the development represents an appropriate next step for resorts where luxury is about delight and enjoyment of natural beauty and a sense of place.

Jane Gifford: What was the brief for the Alila Villas Uluwatu Bali project?

Richard Hassell: WOHA began working on Alila Villas Uluwatu Bali in 2003. Alila is a new brand, and this is their first custom-designed hotel under the Alila Villas name so there was a lot of focus on how the brand would be differentiated. Alila's tag line, "surprisingly different" is creatively stimulating and we focused on design and sustainability as differentiating factors for the physical environment. Other sustainable features include huge overhangs that allow for natural cooling, landscaping based on natural dry-climate vegetation to encourage wildlife and save water, low energy lighting, saltwater rather than chlorine pools, and employment for surrounding villagers. There's also a nature awareness program for guests.

JG: What was your aim with the exterior architecture?

RH: To create a unique architectural language, inspired by the site, by Balinese architecture, landscape and art, but also inspired by the modernist designs of Mies van der Rohe and Carlo Scarpa. In many ways it's a conversation or mediation between the local and global.

JG: What was your overall approach for the interior design?

RH: The interior design is very much integrated with the architecture, as the design is completely indoor-outdoor. Many motifs, such as the spindle shape, are used in both. Guest rooms are inhabited gardens, designed for lounging by the courtyard, by the pool, outside, inside. The whole room can be opened up so that the garden walls are the room's walls, or it can be closed up to make a completely private world. The public areas are designed as if they are an ancient complex, based around a colonnade with various courtyards of different character. Off this colonnade are pavilions for relaxation and enjoying the views.

JG: Is there a stand-out feature of the resort that you're particularly enamoured with?

RH: No, it's more the total integration of site, architecture, interior and accessories that create a very special environment. While the hotel is designed sustainably, this is not immediately obvious; the total focus was on the choreography and enhancement of the guest experience.

Hot on the heels of Uluwatu, a second Alila Villas property opened its doors in December 2009. Set on an unspoilt tropical beachfront on Bali's south west coast, the Alila Villas Soori, is designed by Singapore-based SCDA Architects with the same commitment to luxury and environmental sustainability.

Images: Alila Villas Uluwatu COURTESY: DESIGN HOTELS

