



Into the Wild

Text / Payal Uttam Images / Stefano Scatà

Sebastian Mesdag can't decide if he should compare his Bali home to a tent or an armchair. 'It's like a big tent because it's very integrated with nature and completely open,' he says. On the other hand, he continues, 'It's like an armchair in the sense that the back of the house is hugged by a forest while the front has an expansive view toward the mountains.' Both are apt comparisons for this remote bungalow in Payangan, some 40 minutes north of Ubud. 'We're at a peninsula where two rivers join and there are waterfalls under the house. You hear the water but can't see it because there's jungle everywhere.'

A textile designer who studied painting in Paris and London, Mesdag spent two years searching for this hidden plot of paradise. It took another six years to build the property where he now lives with his jewellery designer wife and their two children. 'At first we had no tarmac roads, only dirt,' he recalls. 'Everything was done with the locals from the village and in the rainy season we couldn't bring in materials.' Yet Mesdag was prepared to wait. Having lived with a tribe in India for years in a mud hut before living with his wife in a small Balinese shack that had no electricity — they cooked on wood fires and bathed in a nearby river — he was used to life in the wild.

While his 350-square-metre home is now equipped with modern appliances, it still has a rustic vibe. The family keeps a small farm with cattle, chickens, pigs and ponies (for the children) as well as a thriving vegetable patch alongside terraces of ginger, lemongrass and turmeric. To reach the property, you drive through two valleys before arriving at a stone path sheltered by tree ferns that dangle overhead. At the front

of the property is a forest of banyan trees. 'In Bali, trees are worshipped and some people were healed by one tree, so it's basically become a holy forest.'

The son of designers, Mesdag took on the home's design himself. 'I never had a plan or full drawings,' he says of his spontaneous approach. The two-storey property is structured around a large *joglo*, or traditional Javanese teak house, which Mesdag repurposed. The structure sits upstairs in the heart of the master bedroom, which is clad in recycled teak and ironwood. This upper floor has no walls. 'It has four different levels reaching up to the bedroom, which is designed like an altar,' he explains. 'And when you lie in bed, you have a big skylight so you can see the moon.' In a sunken space below that opens out to a veranda is an airy lounge with colourful upholstery designed by Mesdag. The children's room sits two levels below and 'hangs outside of the house like a nest'.

The kitchen and dining room are on the ground floor, where Mesdag used a mixture of soil and white cement for the walls. The floors are made from recycled ironwood sourced from Kalimantan, and seating nooks are carved directly into the walls. The home has a minimalist, almost Japanese aesthetic. A few items of Danish-style furniture from Javanese brand Tipota are scattered around the space, including a simple dining table, while the kitchen countertop is made from a slab of hand-carved stone. Mesdag says the family often entertains in this area, and he returns to the tent comparison: 'Normally when people come, they stay — all the sofas become beds and we all camp out together.'

Previous page: 'When we first arrived we were the only foreigners in a village of about fifteen families,' says Sebastian Mesdag of his remote home, deep in the Balinese wilderness north of Ubud

This page: Mesdag grew up on a farm in Spain and wanted to recreate that environment. The home has a small farm with cattle, pigs and ponies. The family also maintains a thriving vegetable patch and terraces of ginger, lemongrass and turmeric





The walls of the kitchen and dining room are made from a mixture of mud and white cement. 'When we dug the place, we kept the soil to use while building the house,' says Mesdag. The custom teak dining table is by Javanese brand Tipota



The property is surrounded by lush tropical forest with a smattering of fruit trees and a small pineapple plantation. The kitchen island is made of a single slab of stone that was carved in Java and required eight people to move it into the home





A large skylight sits above the master bedroom, which opens out to a spacious sitting room and veranda



This page: The home has a handful of custom furniture pieces like this charred-wood coffee table by designer Matt Phillips Long

Facing page: Benches made from old teak pillars sit on the veranda of the master bedroom. The tree in the background is a jaka palm tree, which are often used in the construction of temple roofs



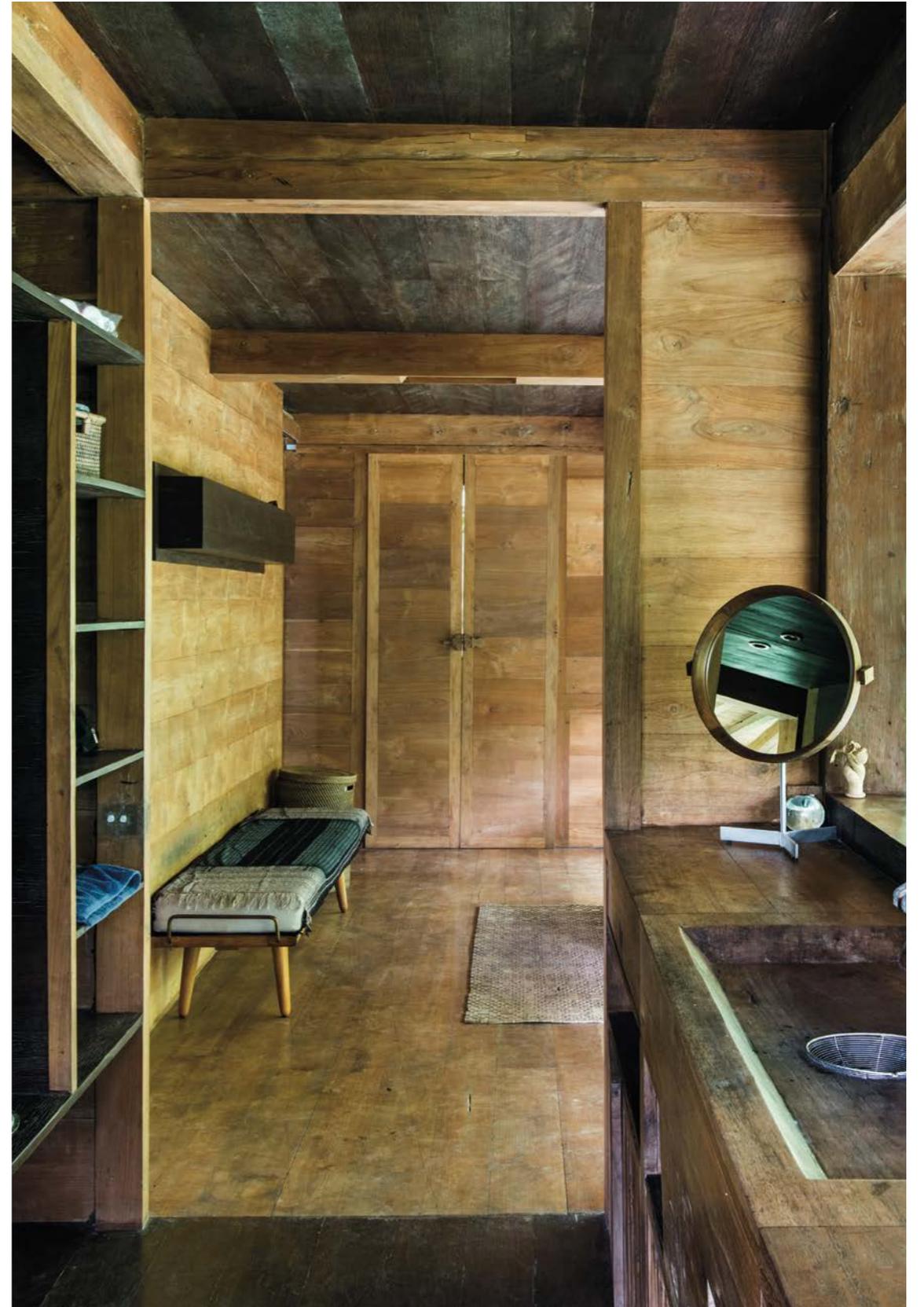


The large painting by local artist Davina Stephens shows Mesdag's pregnant wife and captures elements of the family's lifestyle. It depicts a lush landscape and traditional ceremonies



This page: The children's room was designed to be 'like a nest that hangs out over the house'. The lamps, which are inspired by chicken cages, are made of bamboo and lined with banana-fibre paper. The panelling is a hand-painted pattern from Mesdag's textile collection

Facing page: Mesdag compares the teakwood master bathroom to the interior of a boat





A bathtub clad in recycled ironwood sits outdoors, protected by the roof's overhang. There is also a Japanese-style bathing area with a bucket and stool