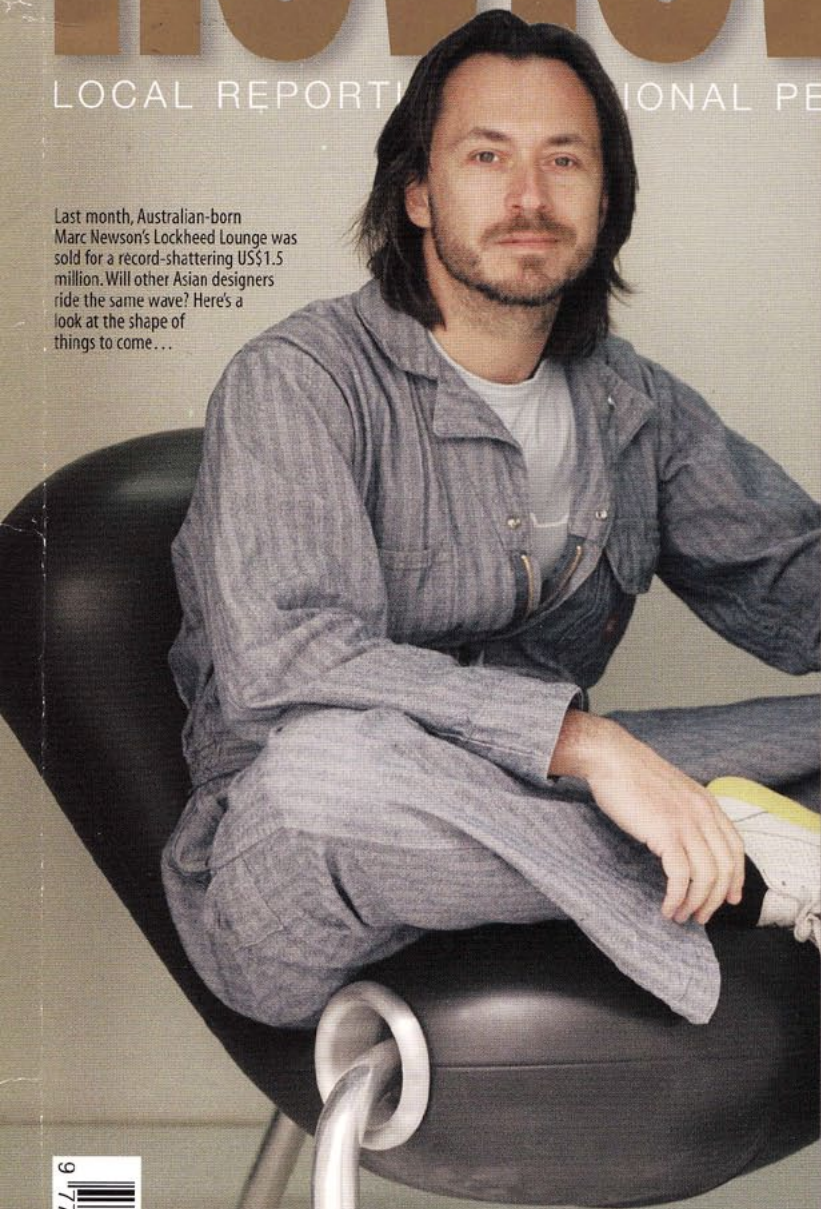


# ReviewAsia

LOCAL REPORTING • PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE • GLOBAL IMPACT

Last month, Australian-born Marc Newson's Lockheed Lounge was sold for a record-shattering US\$1.5 million. Will other Asian designers ride the same wave? Here's a look at the shape of things to come...



## SUPERSTARS of design



### Exclusive interviews

- Douglas Young of Hong Kong
- Thailand's Duangrit Bunnag
- Kenneth Cobonpue & Ann Pamintuan of the Philippines
- South Korea's Kim Young and André Kim



### Plus

- Made in Japan • The Great Commune of China • The rise and fall of Bali Style
- Bernard Chandran: Malaysia's *Datuk* of design



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**Paradigm Shifter**  
 Chonchanok Viravan:  
 Thailand's model woman  
 of independent means



**Special Report:**  
**Travel deluxe**  
 A guide for well-heeled road warriors:  
 top spots and getting there in style



**Culturati**  
 India's MF Husain talks  
 about his brush with death  
 and a tale of endless love





**NATURAL ESCAPE:** In the shallow waters on the shores of Lembongan lies the island's main industry – seaweed farming. Compared with the bright lights and noisy traffic of Bali, the island provides a quiet escape and uncomplicated routines. As infrastructure is limited and only few buildings have electricity, when the sun goes down it truly means lights out.

crowds of other tourists harassed by tired touts and from the noise of traffic and the smell of pollution, a few nights on Lembongan is a powerful antidote.

of between 40 minutes and two hours depending on the vessel, most visitors who make the crossing are day-trippers: divers willing to brave the notoriously strong currents for the stunning coral reef life, and bronzed surfers chasing the island's appropriately named breaks – “Playgrounds” for beginners to intermediates, “Shipwrecks” and “Lacerations” for the foolhardy.

Some liken it to Bali some 20 years ago – actually, 80 years would be more accurate. Lembongan is like a snapshot of Bali before tourism arrived, and without the monsoon conditions. Because it is on the drier, Australian side of the Wallace Line, Lembongan boasts cooler sea breezes and fewer mosquitoes than mainland Bali, but the arid conditions and lack of fresh water also make it largely unsuitable for cultivation. Almost all food, including rice, meat, fruit and vegetables, comes by boat from Bali or the neighboring island of Nusa Penida.

The day-trippers rarely set foot on the island itself, instead using the large pontoons just offshore as a base for aquatic activities before returning to Bali in the afternoon. They don't know what they're missing.

Infrastructure is limited. There's no fresh water supply and although reliable electricity arrived in 2005, when the sun goes down, the island descends into virtual darkness. Save for a few beachfront resorts, electricity is a luxury most people simply can't afford.

### Finding serenity

Lembongan is Bali's best-kept secret. For those seeking a complete escape, a hideaway from the hustle and bustle, from

A single, partially-sealed road rings the island, but there is no traffic. Apart from

### The luxury of simplicity

# Bali's bashful little sister

On the tiny island of Lembongan, visitors can experience traditional Balinese Hindu village life and relax in pure tranquility. **Marian Carroll** crosses the strait to investigate

It is low tide as morning triumphantly breaks over Nusa Lembongan. Across the Badung Strait, the majestic peak of sacred Mount Agung materializes from the clouds over Bali. From a vantage point overlooking Jungutbatu Bay, dozens of red and green seaweed farms rise out of the crystal clear waters like a dazzling patchwork quilt.

Villagers wade knee-deep through the shallows, backs bent as they labor under an

already searing sun to tend to their plots. As the tide turns and the sea reclaims the farms, the farmers climb back into their wooden rowboats for the short trip back to shore. Here, weary women, their dark, lined faces bearing witness to years of hard labor under a blistering sun, unload the plants into baskets and carry them on their heads to a dusty jumble of huts, where they lay them on tarpaulin to dry. The plants will eventually be exported, mostly to Hong

Kong, as a thickening agent for ice cream, cheese and cosmetics, and the wrapping for sushi, among other things.

As the day wears on, the salty yet not unpleasant smell of parched seaweed permeates the village, mingling with the aroma of freshly caught fish being barbecued over coconut husk fires. The farmers wait for the tides to recede so they can do it all over again.

Life on Lembongan revolves around the tides. This small island, located 20

kilometers off the southeast coast of Bali and measuring just 12 square kilometers, survives on its seaweed farming industry, but as an increasing number of stressed-out urbanites find solace in Lembongan's uncomplicated tranquility, tourism is starting to pick up.

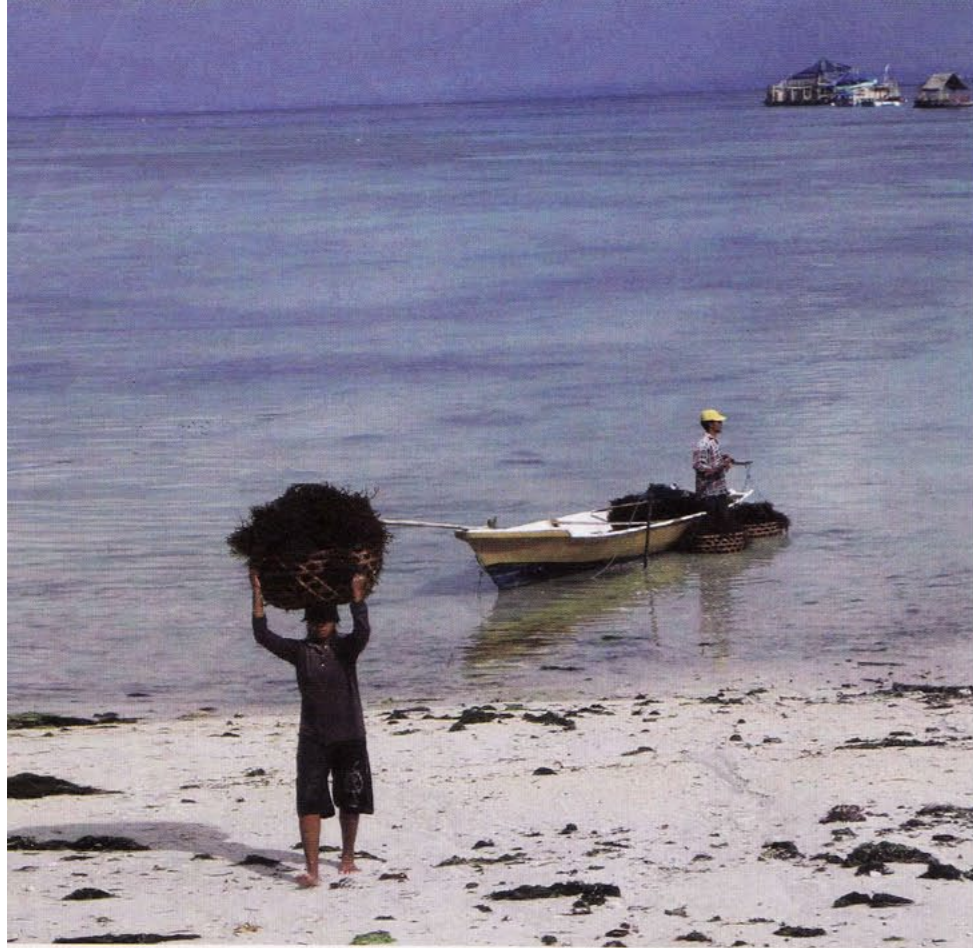
Officially part of Bali province, Lembongan's 7,000 inhabitants are governed by Bali and follow the Balinese Hindu religion and culture. They exude the same warm hospitality as their compatriots on the mainland, and village life centers around farming, community activities and religious rituals. But that's where the similarities end.

The mass tourist invasion of Bali has never made it to Lembongan, despite its proximity and renowned surfing and diving spots. With a travel time from Bali

**SEE EVERYTHING:** Lembongan is so small that touring the whole island takes about 90 minutes by bicycle. There are no cars except for the few pick-up trucks that transport tourists to the main beaches, while the few shops that line the main street sell refreshments, sarongs and T-shirts. The residents tend to go about their daily lives without harassing tourists to buy things.



Photo: Marian Carroll



**GETTING WET:** Life is simple on the island of 7,000 inhabitants – most of them seaweed farmers – as the commercialism of Bali has yet to invade Lembongan. But the strong currents around the island make it popular with surfers who travel out from Bali to ride the waves without even setting foot on the island itself.

Ceningan, the secluded and very pretty Dream Beach, the resorts at Mushroom Bay and the bungalows and villas along Jungut Batu Beach.

Lembongan's main attractions, though, are offshore. Water sports abound and one can surf, dive, snorkel, fish, canoe, parasail and jetski if one craves some adventure. But the beauty of Lembongan is its simple and contented pace. A visitor can take every day as it comes – one won't be subject to some tour guide's itinerary or a checklist of places a visitor simply *must* see and things one *must* do.

If all one ends up doing is lazing by the pool, working on the tan, losing one's self in that novel that's been sitting on the bedside table for the last year, and watching the seaweed farmers at work in the bay below, then it will be a worthwhile trip. And it's one best made sooner rather than later, before the tide turns on the tourism front and puts Lembongan on the map. \*

**Check it out.**  
Go to [www.batukaranglembongan.com](http://www.batukaranglembongan.com) to find out more about the newly opened Batu Karang Lembongan Resort and Day Spa and make reservations online.

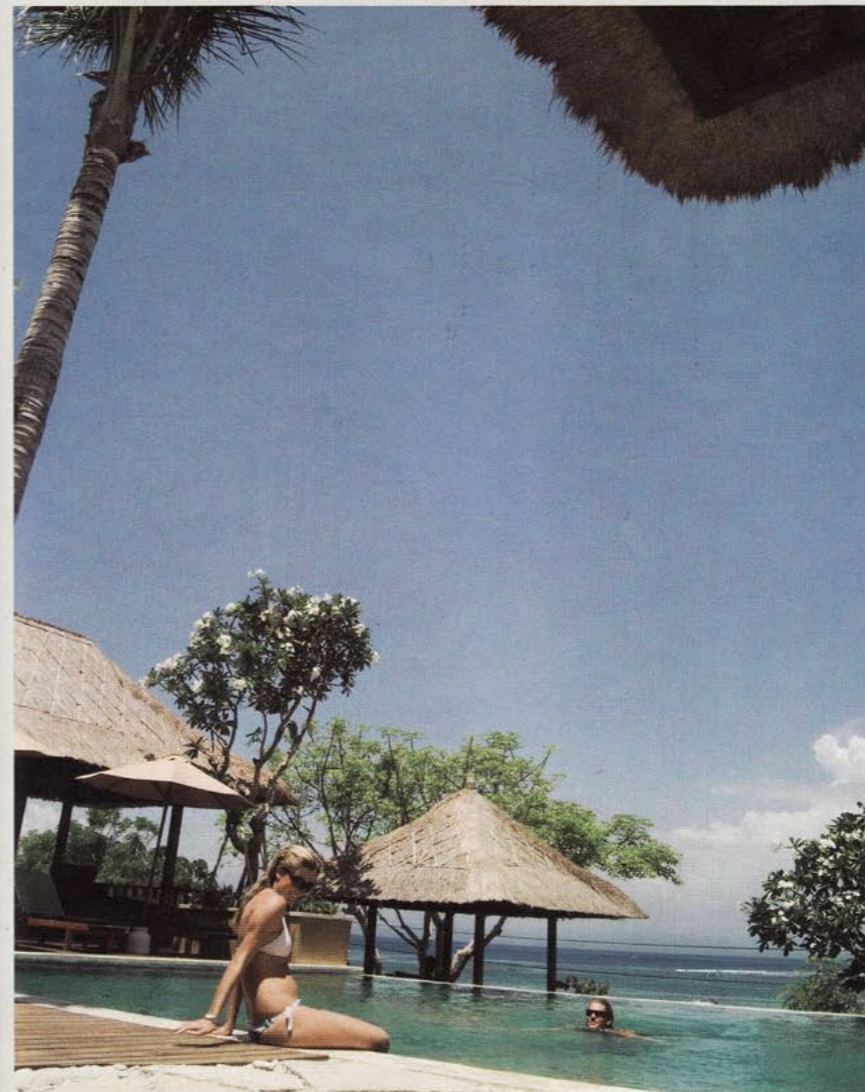
Touring the whole island takes about an hour-and-a-half by bicycle. The trip takes you past the two main villages – Desa Lembongan and Jungut Batu – followed by the Underground House built by a local villager using primitive tools, the expanse of seaweed farms, the mangrove swamp and scrubby inland terrain, the busy bridge connecting Lembongan to the neighboring island of Nusa

the few small pick-up trucks that ferry tourists between the main beaches, there are no cars. The main mode of transport is motorcycle. Nor are there any big hotels, neon lights, souvenir markets, boutiques, fancy restaurants, noisy bars, fast food chains or touts.

**Village life**

Lembongan is Bali's shier sibling. Walking along the paved promenade overlooking the bay and through the main road of Jungut Batu, visitors will be pleasantly amazed at how invisible they will feel. If it were Bali, they'd have already been offered transport, massage, pedicure, manicure, hair braiding, watches, sunglasses, jiggy-jig and marijuana – and that's before they'd even reached the first corner.

Instead, young barefoot kids yell out hellos as they race each other up the road, but otherwise the villagers just look up and smile a greeting and go on with their chores, the women carrying loads of goods on their heads and crafting offerings for an upcoming ceremony, the men tending to fighting cocks, peddling snack bicycles and working on a neighbor's new fence. The weathered faces of vendors peer out from under the shade of small stalls selling a limited range of refreshments, sarongs and T-shirts.



**WET AND WARM:** As an indication of how basic things are on the island, Batu Karang is the only resort on Lembongan with a fresh water swimming pool and hot, fresh water showers – thanks to a desalination plant that produces 25,000 tons of fresh water a day. A water recycling system also keeps the gardens lush and green.

thanks to a desalination plant that produces 25,000 tons of fresh water a day. A generator, private power lines and solar panels supply constant electricity to the resort's chic restaurant and 11 luxurious Balinese villas. A water recycling system keeps the gardens lush and green beside parched neighboring properties.

It is also the only resort that ferries guests around by electric golf buggies – a major luxury when the alternative is climbing dozens of stairs between the villas and the beach.

"It was a huge engineering project just to open a small resort of this standard," says Sinclair. "We started with just the existing 10 villas, but to make the investment in the infrastructure worthwhile, we added the wedding villa, conference facility and spa, and we're building some three-bedroom villas, two new pools up the top and our own jetty."

Just so visitors don't feel completely disconnected from life as they once knew it, the property is also hooked up to wireless internet. So, pack the BlackBerry if you must, but try not to check it every 10 minutes. Lembongan deserves complete surrender. \*

Marian Carroll

**Complete surrender, with a bit of comfort**

Until recently, most of Lembongan's accommodation options consisted of cheap, basic bungalows, typical of those found along Kuta beach on Bali some 30 years ago. But thanks to its newest and most exclusive resort, there's now no need to slum it.

Carved into the steep coral face above Jungut Batu Bay with views to every major surf break, Batu Karang Lembongan Resort and Day Spa was opened last August by a Scottish-Australian family which was seduced by the island's seren-

ity. They saw a market for a five-star-standard resort catering to burned-out executives and well-heeled surfers who want to escape the crowds.

"There was no five-star resort on the island and no good European restaurant, and we saw an opportunity there," says owner Alan Sinclair, a property developer based in Noosa Heads, Australia.

Batu Karang certainly provides an unrivalled level of comfort by Lembongan's standards. It's the only place that boasts hot, fresh water showers and a fresh water swimming pool,

**SIMPLE LIFE:** Batu Karang Lembongan Resort and Day Spa offers luxurious Balinese villas, which are powered by a generator and solar panels. Electric golf buggies help guests negotiate the cliffside location.



Photos: Courtesy of Batu Karang Lembongan Resort and Day Spa