

THE DESIGNER



Bali is a world away from his former habitat in the Place Vendôme, the classiest square in Paris and them some. He would also not probably appear in Paris with a white towel draped around his waist and a pair of rubber thongs. But Pascal Morabito isn't exactly a conformist. He is almost Picasso-like in his approach to life – art comes first – or perhaps love. And then the rest.

He is now an hotelier and has moved with his family to what is now the Morabito Art Villa, an old hotel he has rebuilt on Berawa Beach.

Morabito was born in Nice in 1945 to a family of goldsmiths. He is an architect by education but soon became a

designer, a *créateur* in French, which does not translate easily into English where we tend to compartmentalize designers into categories. Morabito has designed absolutely everything, mostly in the category of luxury goods: jewellery, gold and silver, china, crystal and glass, fine watches, mobile phones, perfumes, cosmetics, leather goods, writing instruments, fashion and fashion accessories. He has also been an interior (and exterior) designer for houses and hotels. As well as that, he is a painter, sculptor and artist of found objects.

Possibly his most famous design was his first: the captive diamond pendant in 1972 which attracted the attention of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.





THE BEACH

We arrive at his hotel to find him (in the towel) negotiating with some people from Sumba who have brought some statuary and some other antique objects.

"Yes, yes. No, No!" he says emphatically as he scans each piece. Some that made it into his collection that day included five antique swords, three or four keris, some small antique statues and more of those Jabba-the-Hutt-like heads from which he has made a whole stone garden.

His hotel philosophy is simple: "I want it to look beautiful, I want it quietly luxurious and I want to show people the fabulous artistic talent from all



over Indonesia. (On the entrance terrace, we have to walk past a collection of 50 masks and some shield-like ornaments that "I am going to make into whole decorative walls.")

Add to that he and his wife Marie-Eve encourage artistic people to stay at the villa, which has been reduced from 22 to 14 rooms around a hectare of lawn and tropical landscaping, making it almost a parkland that gives directly onto the beach.



To give it that extra bit of 'artistic authenticity' they have just had British artist Damien Hirst stay for three months.

"He loved it here. We gave him our own two-storey villa. He relaxed with his family; he worked a little and he loved getting to know Bali," says Morabito. (Hirst is famous for his vivisected cows and sharks as art and for the auction this year when he made many millions selling auctioning off a collection of his own works at Christie's).

And he certainly wasn't idle while he was in Bali. He left several sketches and a fabulous copy of his famous diamond-studded skull called *For The Love of God*, which sold for \$100 million. This one, however, is made of rock salt and the Morabitos have preserved it in a glass case and keep it in what they now call the Damien Hirst Suite.

THE HOTEL

We walk through the gardens which have been relandscaped totally from the old and rather dowdy hotel. He has enlarged the rooms – acres of white wood, whitewashed old pieces and polished concrete on the floors. Everywhere are statues, artifacts and antique weaponry. Dramatic effects are often achieved by swathes of cotton draping and coloured lighting.

"It is a long story we are here," explains Morabito in very good English. "A friend recommended the old hotel three years ago so we rented a villa, completely knocked it over and redid it! They said 'you cannot change things like that' and I said if you don't like it we will change it back when we leave. Eventually, they agreed to sell us the property and, as you can see, it is still a work in progress."

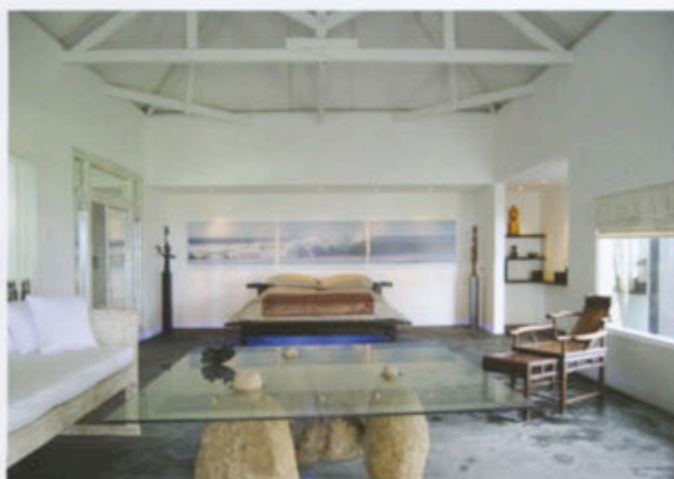


Latest is a huge suite above the lobby: "it will be called the Morabito Suite," says Pascal. A huge indoor-outdoor area with two pools; one black, one white. In the grounds below is another development: a Javanese joglo that will become two bedrooms and a living area. Out in the gardens, there is the unique 'tree spa' with its continuation of the organic stones that contains water, often decorated with flower petals. He has other little touches of harmless egotism (Picasso again?) like the licence plates on all his cars: PM.

There is also the attractive white-washed dining pavilion that used to be the café – everywhere are nature photographs from Marie-Eve, who is a keen photographer.

They have also installed a huge subterranean kitchen which still has views of the lawns, mainly for weddings; next to it a new pastry kitchen with marble for rolling dough.

Morabito has even converted one building into a museum and already there is a substantial collection of antiques from Bali, Sumba, Java and Sumatra.





Just across the way is his atelier. Here there is an electric drill and a grinder and scores of glass bottles containing more things Pascal has 'collected.' Beads, bones, stones, bits of ceramic and iron. He picks up a pair of old rusty keris blades and says "I will mount them together or put one with a piece of stone or glass or something. Whatever; it will be beautiful."

It is here that you think of Picasso again. Pascal Morabito has the same short stature but solid build. And he points to several large photographs of him and Marie-Eve in various wedding costumes. (Picasso was also a passionate man.) "We get married again every year in a different place. We have done it in France, in Japan and this year we did it in Bali, complete with ceremonial costumes and a huge procession and party," he says.

The Morabitos have been in Bali now two and a half years, having sold a dozen boutiques in Europe. But he still designs clothing and accessories on a franchise basis, along with a line of bathroom amenities.

"And I am very happy to say, I have just sent my first design for a sofa to a workshop in Bali where they will make it to my specifications."

FUTURE

Ambitions? Morabito Art Villa is home at the moment to this French family. "We want to finish this place and then I am thinking I would like to do something similar, perhaps in India. We love Srinagar so if the political situation improves, we may look there," he says.

With that, he picks up an old keris, simple and not very expensive. "But look at the colour of that scabbard! A beautiful Chinese lacquer red. How can they do that with natural dyes?" he queries. And questions are part of his existence. "That, and dreams," he says. "I dream and it all comes true."

A little ethereal, perhaps. But when you look around, this haven is right before your eyes. It is indeed, simple and beautiful. It makes you feel good and you begin thinking that, to complement the lotus eaters, we could do with a lot more appreciative and creative talent like his in Bali.



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