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Tropical HOMES

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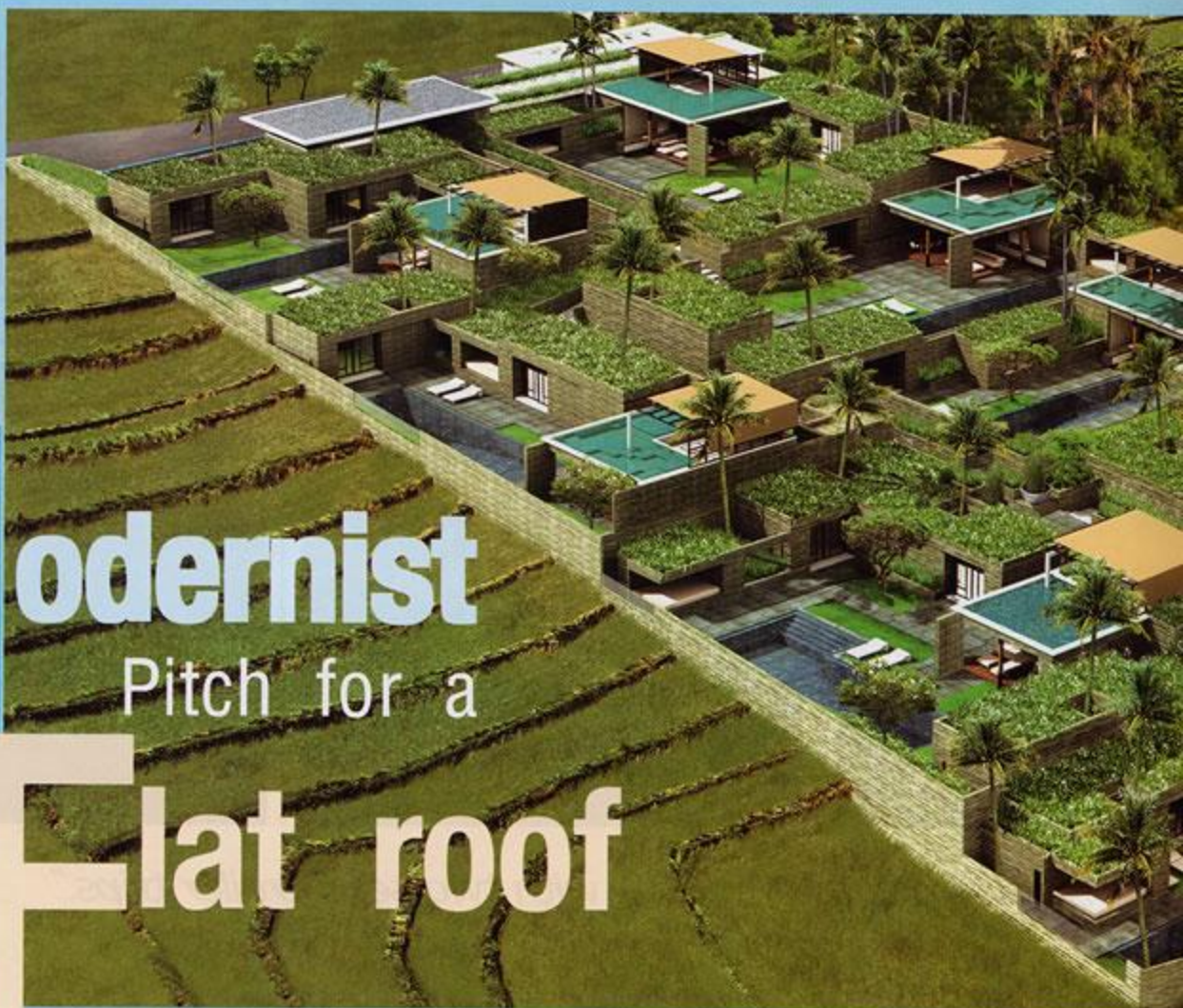
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In Bali, "traditional" house architecture has been going to war with is culturally obtrusive or otherwise undesirable - although some of it conserve more traditional forms are encouraging bad design. Local culturally and environmentally considerate modern

Gary Fell



Modernist Pitch for a Flat roof

Some observers have suggested that officialdom, e.g. the Bali law stipulating that new houses must incorporate traditional roof designs – sometimes stifles the traditionalist-modernist debate in Asia-Pacific tropical home architecture. In part, at least, this is because of a tendency to think of cultural conservation as primarily serving tourism. Public officials and cultural conservationists, according to this perspective, might need education regarding how new takes on the production of Balinese architecture can actually enrich the local scenery and culture.

Healthy debate as part of a vigorous, evolving cultural tradition

Gary Fell and his Bali-based firm GFab want to raise the level of the debate, to make an architecture that is of both its place and its time. 'I'm not interested at all in seeing some superficial veneer of modernism applied,' Fell says. 'That's no better than the veneer of traditional style.'

According to Fell, the not-uncharacteristic overstatement leavened with a grin, 'There was a time when you could barely move for alang-alang thatched roofs. But it's not a matter of whether or not I like it. Aesthetically, it's just too restricting – it can

modernist design. This is not to say that all modernist architecture certainly is. Nevertheless, it may be argued, some attempts to architects G7ab are among those who would suggest that a tropical architecture is both possible and desirable.



Wabi (left, below) is designed to merge with a traditional landscape despite its modernist features.

constrain originality.* More than that, it can interfere with function. For example, he argues, the traditional overhanging eaves push the house structure towards the centre of the plot. 'Next thing,' he says, 'you get swimming pools the size of bathtubs.' In any case, change is inevitable. A booming villa market on southern Bali is putting strong upward pressures on real-estate prices. In response, plot sizes are decreasing. This has resulted, among other things, in a move towards centrally serviced and managed villa complexes. A less desirable pressure, in many minds, threatens to force building high-rise.

Instead, says Fell, shrinking plots should encourage new design and innovative ways of providing the sense of spaciousness.

