



Balinese Beauty

*By Verne Maree,
photography by Michael
Bernabe and Martha
Chaudhry*

I've never seen anything remotely like this in Singapore. Tucked away behind a stone wall in Woollerton Park, off Farrer Road, this is a genuinely Balinese-style haven – a flow of interior and exterior living areas, charming courtyards and magical gardens. American DENISE PALLADINO showed me around the remarkable home that she shares with her South African husband JOHN and four children.



Country of origin: Denise is American, John South African.
Time in Singapore: Five and seven years respectively.
Size of their home: An enormous 8,000 square feet of contemporary Balinese-style house with six bedrooms, open and flowing spaces, several gardens and a pool.
What they've done to the property: A huge amount of work landscaping the gardens and the pool area.
Personal style: Asian Contemporary.
Home style: An eclectic mix reflecting their own histories and their extensive travels.
Who lives here: John, Denise and four pre-teen and teenaged kids: Denise's son Dylan; and John's daughters Morgan and Chloe, and son Tyler.

Getting together

She'd visited Asia many times for her work in the fashion industry, Denise says, and met John five years ago when she came to spend the summer with her sister who lives here. His South African accent first sparked her interest, as she loves that country and Africa in general, having spent some time there, and they soon hit it off. "His heart and soul are there, and I understand the draw."

"My son assimilated quickly into the Singapore American School, and he now has three brothers and sisters and a father; and John's kids have another brother and a mother." (John's late wife passed away about ten years ago.)

Moving in

It's not easy to find a house like this, says Denise, in what must be the understatement of the year. Going through a broker, it took her more than 12 months to find just the right place to accommodate her big, blended family.

Their previous home was the penthouse in Honolulu Tower; a huge space, she agrees, but: "We wanted something on one level, and with a garden – somewhere we could live both inside and outside."

According to her, the pool with its lovely *bale* is everyone's favourite place. And luckily for the kids, the wing that accommodates all four of their bedrooms, plus a guest room, runs the full length of the pool. "They're in and out of it all the time," she says, "and we love to relax out there on the *bale* cushions."



Most of the lanterns came with the house, but the statues have been collected over the years – from Bali, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and more. There’s plenty of wildlife – cockatoos come to visit, bats fly in and out, and the odd monitor lizard lumbers around, too.

“It’s great for parties,” says Denise. “Not just the kids but everyone is in and out of the pool.”

Gardens and fish

John is an avid gardener – luckily, as the property has no fewer than three gardens; and, as the house had been standing empty for some time, they needed a lot of work. He not only created these lush sanctuaries, but maintains them too, says his wife with pride. “Instead of a man cave, John has three gardens to keep him busy!”

The same goes for the enormous tropical fish tanks. In the dining room is a freshwater Amazon

This page, clockwise from top left: Travel memorabilia is in every room everywhere; A lot of family time is spent in the spacious pool area; Just one of John’s three beautifully landscaped gardens; A table extends the kitchen island to make a spot that’s perfect for family breakfasts

Opposite page, top to bottom: A stunning saltwater aquarium separates this ante-room from the main living room; A freshwater Amazon aquarium adds interest to the dining room

tank full of beautiful discus fish, and the saltwater tank in the central living room teems with everything from corals and sponges and sea anemones to flitting fish – even a moray eel. As you can see from the complex filtration system hidden underneath it, maintaining this tank is a huge job.

Diving, says Denise, is a passion that the whole family shares.



This page, clockwise from bottom left: Master bedroom; Ensuite dressing room and bathroom; Upstairs from the master bedroom, John's study houses a world-class collection of botanical prints





Above: This recently bespoke piece of artwork by photographer Martha Chaudhry has been literally woven from photographs taken on special occasions and holidays shared by Denise and John's "blended family"

Furnishing and collecting

When it came to furnishing the house, Denise says, they probably gave away more furniture than they acquired. While she loves open space and hates clutter, her husband is an inveterate collector of whatever takes his wide and varied interest – from regional artworks, antique Chinese, Indian, Korean and Sri Lanka furniture and *objets d'art*, to an impressive array of old maps of Africa and his extensive, world-class collection of botanical art books: mainly from Africa, dating from the 1600s onwards and all exquisitely hand-painted.

An assortment of white-covered sofas, chairs and *chaises longues* were the main new additions to their home; the comfortable sofa we're sitting on in the central living room is from Taylor B. In conjunction with the plethora of interesting and eclectic wooden furniture, their fresh, white look works beautifully. They reflect the light that pours in through long open windows and wide, floor-to-ceiling doors, enhancing the indoor-outdoor feel.

Among this mainly neutral palette, splashes of rich red – in the cabinetry of the fish tanks, in the artwork and in the cushions and throws – add warmth and provide visual texture.

Art

Like the rest of this home, the art collection is a wonderfully varied mix of the antique and the contemporary. As with the furniture, there's far too much to list here; I'm especially struck, though, by two huge monochromatic works by acclaimed Chinese artist Qiu Zhie that hang in one elegant and minimally furnished ante-room.

The family's latest proud acquisition, however, is a piece of bespoke "photographic weaving", commissioned from one of Denise's friends, the photographer Martha Chaudhry. Having first asked her client to provide up to 20 photographs from special times in her, her husband and their four children's lives together, Martha came up with a compositional design for approval, and then literally wove the photographs together. The result is an evocative, artistic and emotionally satisfying whole.

"It was just so appropriate," as Denise says – "this blended artwork to represent our blended family."



Recommendations

Altitude Fitness – “Altitude training before you climb your next mountain”
altitude.sg

Cathay Platinum Movie Suites – “The only way to see a movie”
cathaycinplexes.com.sg

Capella Singapore – “For a night away to reconnect and unwind with my husband”
capellahotels.com

Chopsuey Café – “Can’t live without the pumpkin and cod dumplings”
pscafe.com

Martha Chaudhry
Photography
marthachaudhry.com

Paresa Hotel, Phuket – “Luxury pool villas for a mini-break, with dramatic sea views”
paresaresorts.com

Patisserie G – “The best macarons outside of France”
patisserieg.com

Project Acai – “Something to satisfy my sweet tooth”
project-acai.com

Simone Irani – “A chic and luxurious resort-wear brand”
facebook.com/SimoneIraniResortWear

Stand Up Paddling School (SUP Singapore) – “For weekend family fun on Sentosa”
supschool.com.sg 