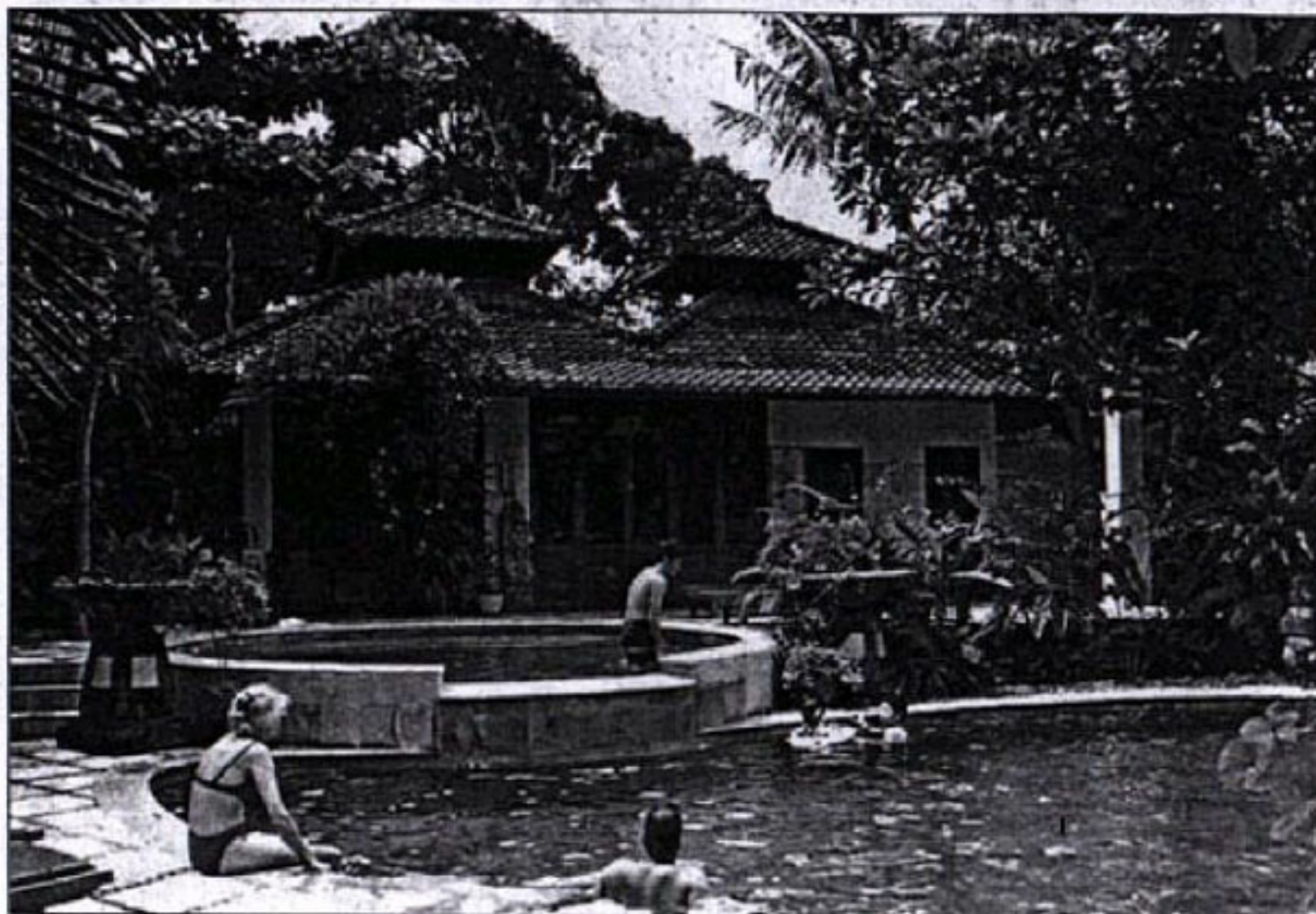


Once upon a time in verdant Alam Kulkul



A corner of Kulkul at Kuta beach, Bali. The hotel has been designed to provide unique accommodation with traditional Balinese architecture.

Once upon a time some 30 years ago, a young man came to Bali. Almost immediately, he was captivated by the beauty of the verdant island and its sun-splashed beaches.

Standing on Kuta beach in front of a piece of land that had four pandanus shrubs beneath a waru tree he wished that, one day, he could open a little hotel in such a place when he grew up.

This dream was forgotten by the time Feisol Hashim later became a successful businessman.

In the mid-1980s, he bought Pulau Kotok and developed it. Then a year later, he looked for investment elsewhere, and found himself drawn toward Bali.

"Every time we approached Bali and saw the coconut trees and pristine beaches from our plane seats, my wife and I felt so excited," recalled Feisol.

"And when it was time to return to Jakarta, we always left Bali with a heavy heart."

In 1989, his friend Diding called him from Bali to say that there were three pieces of land up for sale. Without seeing the land, Feisol gave the go-

ahead to purchase any one of them.

However, he was given only a very short time during which to transfer money from his bank in New York to BCA in Bali. It was a harrowing experience, but he managed to close the deal in the seconds before the deadline.

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Soon after the purchase, he came to Bali to view the land. Diding brought him to the spot, and he was astounded to suddenly see a familiar sight: four pandanus shrubs — underneath a waru tree!

"It was unbelievable ... this was the very plot I had dreamed about owning some day," he mused.

Now that they owned the land, how did they go about building a hotel? Where did they start?

"Months later, my wife and I made the floor plans — cutting up newspaper to represent the villas and buildings. We did and re-did them," says Feisol.

Finally, they decided to let an architect do the job. But they did it the unconventional way: they commissioned a non-commercial architect — university lecturer Ida Bagus Oka Ladung.

Oka was passionate about Balinese architecture, a subject he taught at the university.

"He was a purist when it came to Balinese architecture," Feisol says. "No wonder he was such a perfectionist ... the masons had to do and re-do the pieces repeatedly until they got them right."

According to Feisol, the hotel was designed after the human body. "For example, the lobby, like the head, was designed to be visible and majestic," explains Feisol.

The lobby was raised to a level which commanded majesty; the ceiling was crafted after the ceiling of an old palace that existed in Gianyar in the 1930's.

The piece of land could hold up to 150 rooms, but

Feisol resisted this temptation by building only half that number.

"I didn't want to maximize the space because I wanted a hotel where people would want to come back," says Feisol.

When the hotel was completed, his wife decided to name it "Kulkul" after an ancient gong that area villagers used on special occasions.

"It is used to signify a warm welcome; it also implies that our guests are important, and that we hope that their stay with us will be "ceremonious," says Feisol.

And so a house for a Kulkul was built at the main entrance.

Kulkul became the first boutique hotel in Bali. According to Feisol, unlike the criteria that starred-hotels have to follow, "boutique" is a relative term and its up to the owner to define its meaning.

Feisol's dream was to have a hotel that would have its own identity and character. He wanted it to be known as a "smiling hotel," one where the staff was always friendly, and could call you by your first name by the second day.

It was also the first hotel to have a *halal* kitchen.

Ten years later, Kulkul was rebuilt. However, soon after the completion of the project, on January 20, 2000, an electrical fire gutted Papa's Café and the adjacent hotel lobby.

"If not for the boys who risked their lives trying to put out the fire from the rooftop, the rest of the hotel and the neighboring ones would have also been lost," said Feisol.

That night, he was despondent and couldn't sleep because of the tragedy. Touched by the loyalty of his staff, he vowed to look after them and to renew their hope for the future.

"I told them that we would rebuild Kulkul together," said Feisol.

After the fire, Feisol used the opportunity to rebuild Kulkul into an even better hotel.

Today, it is very popular with the Japanese, and is regarded as "Ubud in Legian" in Japan.