

IDYLIC INDONESIA

Minimalist yet rich in texture and vision, Blancostudio's brand new project 'Her' is a beautiful Balinese-Japanese-inspired residence located in an idyllic spot in Indonesia. This is a meditative escape, strongly attuned to nature and designed with a clear sense of serenity.



Balinese architect and designer Conchita Blanco spent most of her childhood in Bali before moving to Australia for her studies. The granddaughter of a famous Spanish painter, Don Antonio Blanco, she was surrounded by art from an early age, which has always influenced her to be creative and explore her artistic interests. It was no surprise that she went to study at the University of Melbourne, choosing a bachelor's degree in Environments and a master's degree in Architecture. It was there that her love for architecture and design was nurtured: 'While studying architecture, I fell in love with the design process and its challenges. Every project brings with it a different process, approach and journey. It is a job I find hugely inspiring because evolution is never the same,' we hear from her. Thus, Blanco is very fascinated by how architects and designers can create a space that has impact and evokes emotions.

Besides working as an architect, in 2016 she started designing products and furniture for her own custom woodworking studio Kalpa Taru based in Bali. This greatly developed her extensive knowledge of Indonesian craftsmanship, as well as her keen sense of working with local materials, particularly a regional, coveted range of sustainably sourced tropical hardwoods. Four years later, Conchita Blanco therefore launched her own design studio Blancostudio. Her approach to design has always focused on using natural materials, with a strong emphasis on simplicity and



bespoke details. Responding to the context, both on the client, location, direction of the sun and the materiality of Indonesian raw materials all play an important role for her within the development of each design. The team at Blancostudio has the best sense of what the right choices are for their clients by creating something that will stand the test of time with a strong sense of connection to the place and the residents themselves. 'I am particularly drawn to working with natural materials because I believe it expresses their age and place in history,' she tells us. The big advantage for her is that it allows her to make the patina of wear part of the design and enrich it.

Tactility is important in her designs as Blanco loves combining contrasting textures to create a story in a space. 'As the wife of a carpenter, I have a deep passion and love for wood, especially teak. I therefore find craftsmanship essential to incorporate into my designs.' Wood is a material that is alive and consists of different layers which means you have to learn to understand each spe-

cies over and over again to discover a different beauty each time. With her, for instance, instead of a polished effect on a stone, you are more likely to encounter a honed or matt finish, which in turn results in a patina that tells a story about the place. Blanco believes that for a design to be successful, it must

A sleek aesthetic of sober, Japanese-inspired minimalism

have a strong sense of connection or harmony with the context and not feel intrusive. Thus, her architectural design forms vary, but the common thread always remains to connect with the natural materials in the environment. More still, when the architect makes connections or points of different mat-

ters, you will find that she often creates an opening between the two, so that two different materials will never touch. This creates a sense of lightness in the quality of the space.

HOME ESCAPE - PROJECT HER

We would like to take you to one of Blancostudio's most stunning projects, called Her. It is inspired by the peace and completeness that Anna, the owner of the home, felt during her travels to Japan. She was particularly looking for a personal space where she could develop her profession and receive guests and clients alongside her family home in Bali. This haven was taken in hand by Blancostudio and studio Kalpa Taru. The Japanese-inspired house on stilts with Balinese roots comprises an office, tea room, wooden bathroom, and a Japanese garden. The residence is accessed through a door made entirely of solid wood, like most of the house. The entrance is formed by a stone walk to the floating residence, nestled in the Japanese garden designed by Sebas Mesdag. Conchita Blanco ap-

proached the design as a conversation between materials and spaces by studying traditional joinery and structures from Japan and Indonesia, together with her husband Avalon, founder of Kalpa Taru. He made the entire residence from the wood from an old tree from Bengawang that stood alone somewhere along the river on the island of Java. The structure, interior and surroundings harmonise, combining modern needs, Balinese philosophy and heritage craftsmanship.



The residence's architectural aesthetic translates into tranquillity and a sense of completeness. Made of solid wood and built on stilts, the project presents a well-designed blend of contemporary Japanese architecture and traditional Balinese construction techniques. Adhering to an ethos of sustainability, the design team made the most of conventionally used and locally sourced materials, using traditional carpentry and structures from Indonesia and crafting the house with wood from a plugged tree found.

The floating home serves as a personal space to work and receive guests and clients. Letting yourself be carried away by the wonders of nature is the focus here. Partly thanks to the beautiful Japanese garden designed by Sebas Mesdag, you can be completely immersed in nature and it offers intimacy and privacy, as well as a strong connection to the outdoors. This is due to the large windows, which invite the outside world in at every corner. A clean aesthetic of understated, Japanese-inspired minimalism is found

throughout; one of clean shapes, simple geometries, and understated décor. Furthermore, a neutral colour palette creates warm, calming interiors that soothe and relax, while elegant smooth wooden surfaces are complemented by natural fabrics to add a soft, organic touch. However, the nature of the location was a challenge. For instance, there is only 95 square metres between private lanes and houses with no views. The design studio had to develop its own oasis of calm while creating a sense of space and openness. In the





process, the residence is elevated, allowing nature to grow and overlooking the peaceful garden. It is ideal for escaping reality but still being connected to nature. In short, the whole had to ultimately create a serene environment that is neutral but rich in texture, yet soothing to the senses. Blanco found its inspiration in the traditional Japanese ryokan, this is a Japanese form of a family hotel or guesthouse, and, especially for the owner, wanted to modernise the design to meet the studio's modern needs. Essences of the ryokan were therefore applied to the interior, such as the materiality of the handmade paper window screens, the tatami floor, and traditional Japanese wooden joinery. As a space for contemplation, the quality of light and shade was important, and for this Blanco studied the lighting conditions within Bali's temple pavilions. Thus, there is always a low but warm natural light that penetrates every room, and yet there is no need for artificial light during the day.

With this impressive project, the architect's main aim was to integrate Balinese roots by applying fundamental architectural elements of the traditional Balinese bale bengong; translated as a "daydream house". This place is often present in any Balinese house, a space where you contemplate or just slip into a daydream amid the silence of the open environment while sheltered from the sun. In short, taking inspiration from the context to create a more meaningful design. It is a concept that exists to fulfil the needs of its users without being intrusive to the surroundings, and let that be exactly what we also constantly look for within designs.



A mix of contemporary Japanese architecture and traditional Balinese building techniques

Finally, we talked to Conchita Blanco about her future plans and what is still on her bucket list. To the latter, she immediately had an answer ready: a contemporary art museum. She also has a clear message which she would like to send into the world: 'It is important for us to take pride and value in what is made locally and by hand. In today's world of advanced technology and machine-made materials that are growing so fast, the role of traditional makers and crafts in Bali is slowly diminishing. I believe it is vital to maintain this, but to preserve the past does not mean to recreate something from the

past, but to create modern designs that use traditional techniques.' Furthermore, for Blanco, real life is about creating connections, and spaces have the ability to influence the quality of interaction between people. As an architect, she spends a lot of time fantasising and dreaming about how a design can affect people's lives. For her, seeing a finished space, the environment and the life it brings, is a reminder of what real life is like.

With these beautiful words, we end this inspiring story and hope to have inspired our readers to stay true to themselves and their surroundings. The artificial environment is growing in scale. According to the studio, there must still be a way to design and build in harmony with nature. It should be taken into account that the built footprint should allow nature to thrive, the ecological impact of material and equipment choices, these are small efforts that can have a significant impact if done collectively. The materials they often use range from local stone, masonry and wood. My colour palette varies depending on the context and assignment. But in every project, I always keep a small colour palette that includes no more than three colour tones. We end this inspiring story and hope to have inspired our readers to stay true to themselves and their surroundings.

(Text: Elke Aerts)



Photography by Iker Zuñiga

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