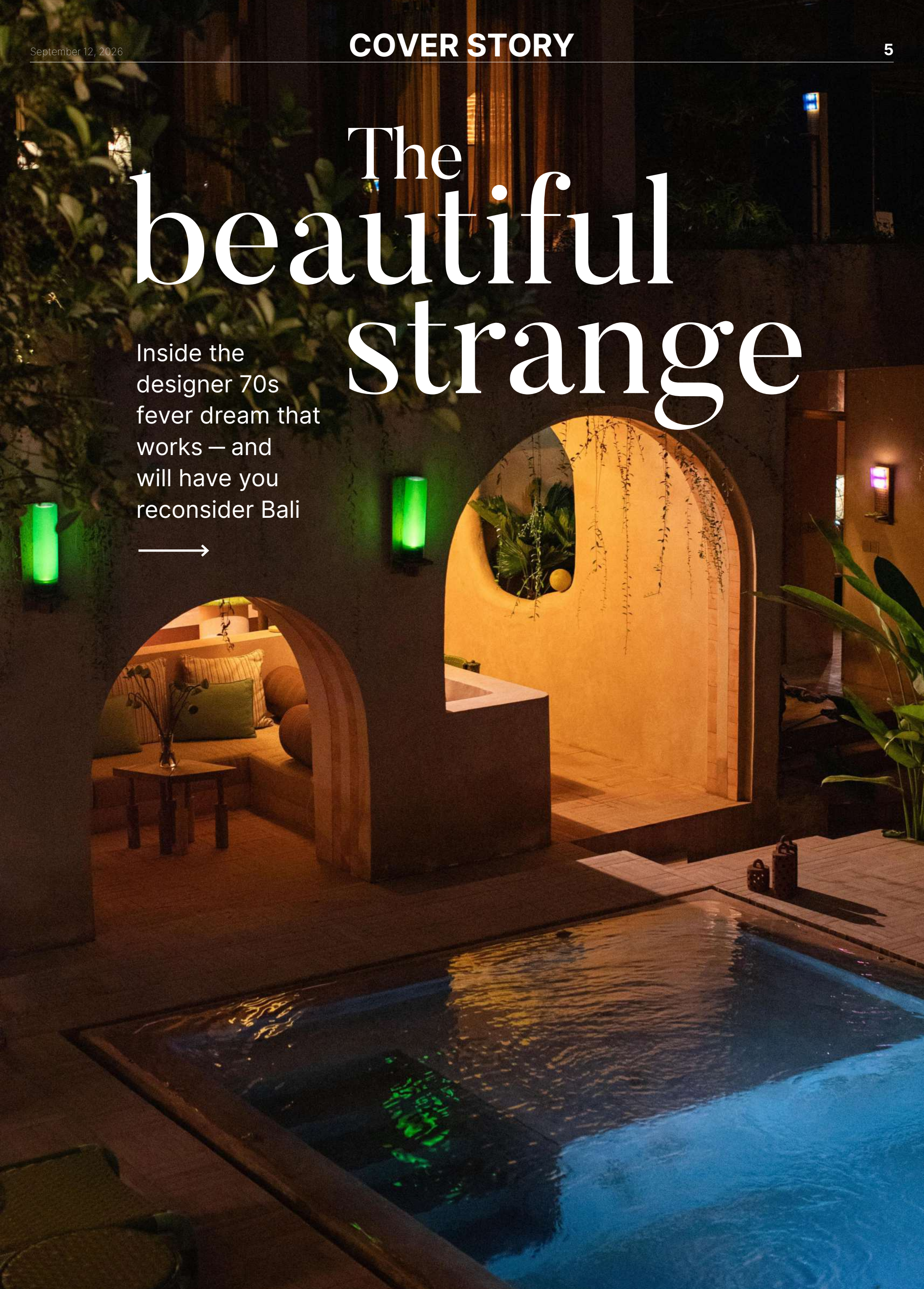
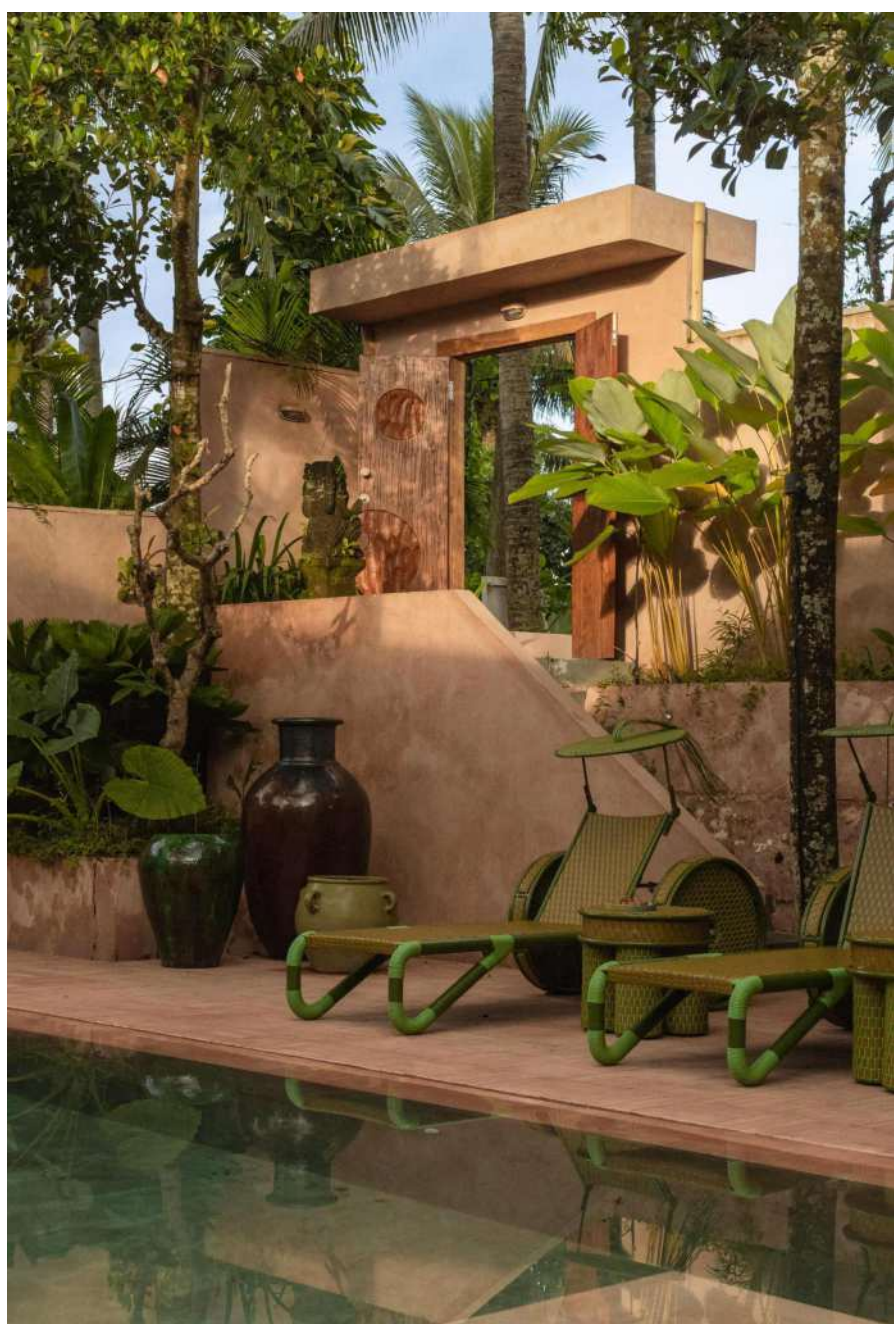


The beautiful strange

Inside the
designer 70s
fever dream that
works — and
will have you
reconsider Bali





CLARE RIGDEN

Spiritual enlightenment can mean different things to different people.

For some, it arrives after 18 hours taking peyote in a sweaty tent in the Mexican desert. For others, it comes in full force after six days downward dogging on the banks of the Ganges, or in the quiet smugness of a silent retreat in the Byron Hinterland.

Sometimes, though, it sneaks right up on you — a sense of deep contentment as you lie floating on your back in a hotel pool staring up at a jackfruit tree, wondering whether its enormous, spiky fruit might fall onto your head, taking you out of the moment — or maybe just taking you out, full stop.

The pool is in Bali, because of course it is, situated in the central courtyard of a stylish new boutique hotel called Moon Gang, a five-suite oasis designed by Yasmine Ghoniem via her AD100-lauded YSG Studio and owned by Adelaide-based owner-operator Kirsten Millbank.

You're floating star-fished, listening to the muted sounds of Massive Attack spinning on vinyl from the hotel's nearby communal space, and it all just feels . . . right.

This hotel isn't your usual Balinese wellness retreat — Moon Gang feels different because it is different. It's all about the vibes. And they're in plentiful supply.

Tucked away among the rice paddies of hilltop Ubud on the Sari Organic Walk, the hotel is accessible only by scooter. It's three minutes by bike (seven if you walk), and when you arrive at the hotel's base, a little shopfront off Ubud's main drag called Mini Moon Gang, a staff member,





dressed in a brightly coloured Moon Gang football jersey shirt and Balinese sarong, will ferry you and your suitcases (via scooter) up to the venue.

You'll putt past the organic cafes, local warungs, yoga retreats, galleries and vegan chill-out spots that dot this out-of-the-way area, and by the time you arrive, you'll feel as though you've stumbled upon a little bit of "Old Bali" — far from the relentless traffic noise and chaos of Ubud's hectic main street.

The great thing about this little tucked-away micro hotel is that while it has hotel pretensions, it could just as well be a stylish villa you've booked to stay at with friends.

And you can: there are five suites at Moon Gang, each available to be booked individually, or you can reserve the hotel as a whole (it has a 10-person capacity).

Equally, you can leave it to chance, knowing you'll likely be squirrelled away with like-minded travellers who've found their own way to this trippy little bolthole in Bali — part design destination, part wellness getaway and one enormous *vibe*.

Inclusive in the price of each stay is a suite of wellness activities and the hotel's incredibly lovely and knowledgeable local staff will tailor them to your stay.

Want to escape, tune everything out and do absolutely nothing by the hotel's natural pool for a week? They'll leave you alone.

Looking for a wellness reset? They've got this covered too: they can book you in for a full spectrum sauna session, including traditional and



infrared light wave therapy, or a lovely local Balinese yogi named Gina (pronounced Geena) can travel to Moon Gang to lead yoga, healing, breathwork and meditation sessions — all inclusive.

These are held on the rooftop of the venue's in-house spa (where the sauna is housed), which was established in partnership with Fields of Yarrow, a botanics-based skincare brand whose ingredients are organically grown and harvested across Indonesia.

The day spa treatments are extra (a massage will set you back around \$130 — not cheap, but thoroughly worth it), but everything else is included in the price, and the spa, when not in use, provides a beautiful backdrop for wellness activities.

The terrace is open to the elements, but don't worry, staff are happy to light incense and provide mosquito spray to keep away the bugs — the tiny gekko who rested on my arm during shavasana, post-yoga, was a welcome intruder and one I allowed to stay.

It's a lovely space for morning yoga as you listen to the accompanying cacophony of nearby roosters, each crowing their own salute to the sun.



There's a trippy sound experience on offer as well — a “plant orchestra”, which sees the terrace's plants plugged in to create their own sonic soundscape, via technology designed by Indonesian dance-electro duo Bottlesmoker (a name that seems apt). It means you're literally doing yoga while listening to the plants next to you — we told you this place was a trip.

Designer Yasmine Ghoniem (the woman responsible for Zoe Foster Blake's stylish Sydney home, a whimsical flight of fancy worthy of an online nosy) and her fingerprints are all over this space. Her design studio worked with local Indonesian artists and craftsmen where possible to help bring her wild vision — part traditional Balinese sanctuary, part Japanese minimalist oasis, part tropical fever dream — to life.

Suites are decked out with handmade ceramic lights and there are fun ceramic mushroom sculptures in the suite we're in (if you get Moon Gang's resident driver Yoyo to ferry you from the airport, make sure to have him tell you about the other shrooms that grow locally around Ubud).

Glazed lava stone tiles can also be found across the suites, with hand-dyed curtains made from natural plant extracts (we're talking indigo, mango, coconut and ketapang leaf) and which gently dance in the breeze of a tropical afternoon.

It's all delightfully moody — the ensuite bathrooms all dark, smokey grey-blues with showers that open to the outside via designer breeze-blocks (read: sexy as heck).

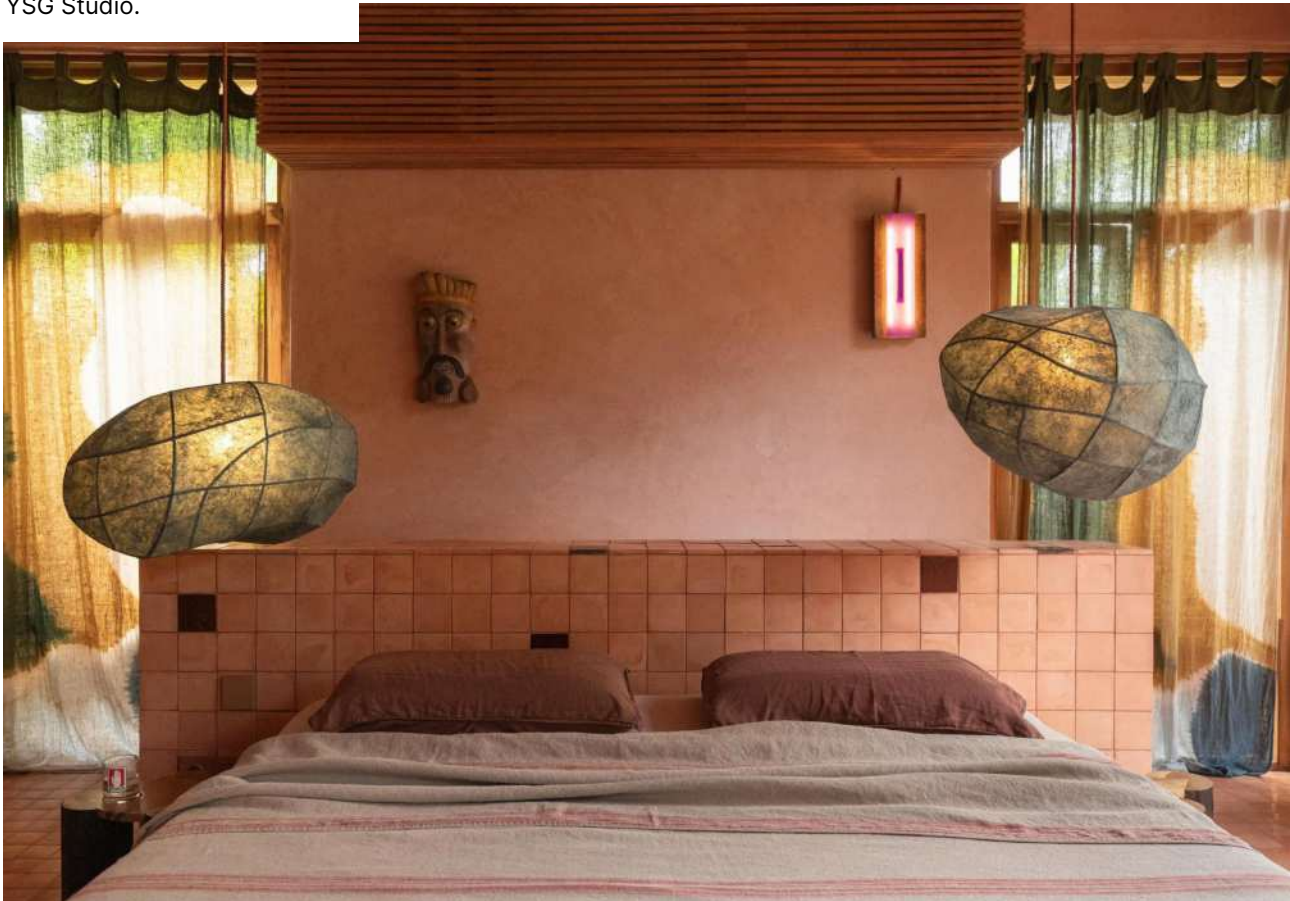
Linen on the beds is soft and organic, and there's an infrared night light within reach to help your body stay attuned to its circadian night rhythms.

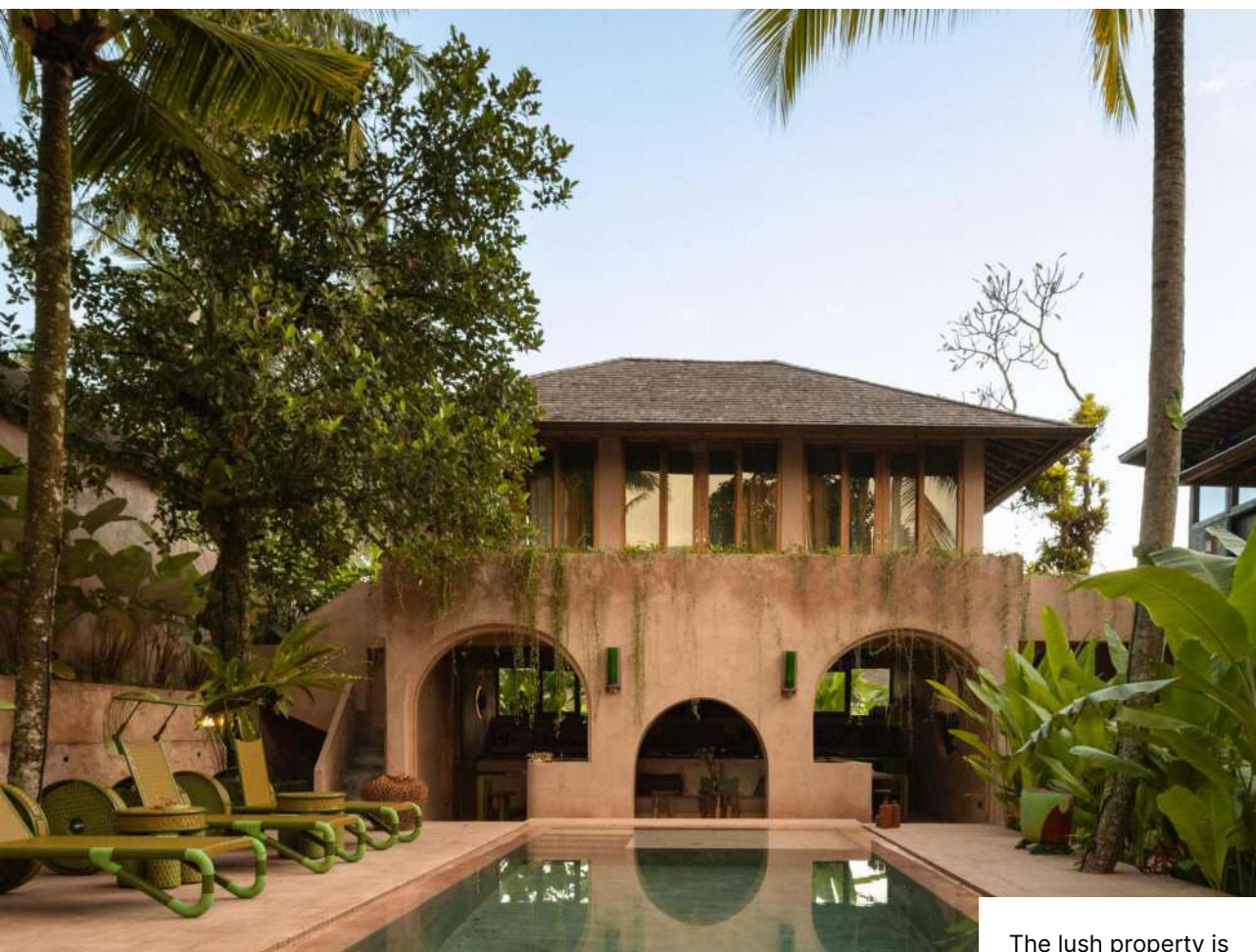
Each bedroom also has its own acrylic paint set while a typewriter is available to borrow, should the mood strike for some analogue creative pursuits.

The hotel doesn't have an in-house kitchen — all food, including the complimentary breakfast, comes courtesy of Dragonfly, a charming cafe parked opposite the property and which allows guests to sit in its open-air pavilion among the rice fields to enjoy fresh-baked bread, eggs, and surprisingly great coffee at breakfast time.

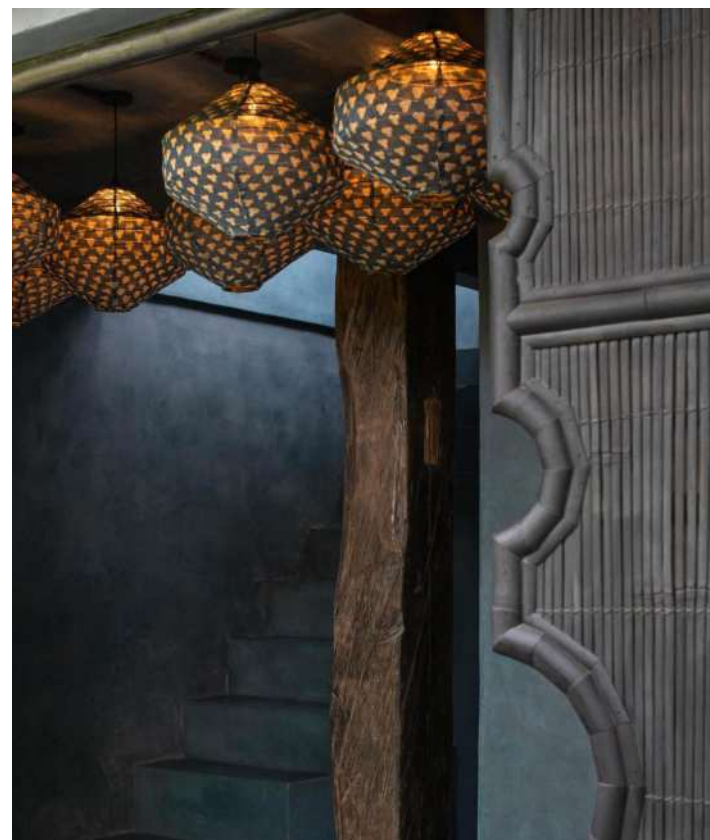


Moon Gang interiors created by Yasmine Ghoniem via her YSG Studio.





The lush property is anchored around the central courtyard pool.



The venue's chatty tabby, Caramel, will come and sit with you, though be warned he also loves the little sweet biscuits that accompany morning coffee, which he will steal when you are not looking.

If you prefer, food can be sent across to Moon Gang to enjoy in your suite or poolside, propped up in one of the hotel's bespoke loungers, designed from handwoven, upcycled waste plastics.

Where the kitchen might have been is Nongkrong Lounge, Moon Gang's communal chill-out space, housing a tea station, vinyl bar, and fitted with lounges to sprawl out on and chill.

Moon Gang has an extraordinarily good selection of records to listen to, sourced by Indonesian DJ Munir Harry Septiandry (aka Midnight Runners) from around the world. He's curated the beats that accompany poolside spiritual awakenings — the guy who picked out the Massive Attack that soundtracked that earlier moment of extreme serenity.

He's also the man responsible for the excellent selection of Japanese and Indonesian rare groove getting a rinse via the decks in the lounge. The husband of a family also staying while ROAM was there clearly enjoyed reliving his DJing days. They became part of our Moon Gang during our stay, and excellent travelling companions.

A stack of vintage tapes curated for my listening pleasure (complete with 1980s Walkman) and the soundtrack to my spiritual epiphanies — the whole thing was one gigantic vibe.

Three days spent chilling in this oasis and the world disappears. Thankfully, Moon Gang's good vibrations stay with you long after checking out.

MOON GANG

Jl. Subak Sok Wayah Jl. Raya Ubud, Ubud, Kecamatan Ubud, Kabupaten Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia

PRICE

From \$310 per suite including breakfast (low season)

INSIDER

This truly unique property, about two hours from Bali's I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport by car, can be booked on an exclusive basis and for events, weddings, launches and private retreats (prices upon inquiry). moongangbali.com