

The lighter and darker sides of Bali, Asia's fashionable playground

the yak

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WARISAN'S NEW BLOOD

ONDY SWEETING MEETS MATTHEW BATER,
THE NEW MAN AT FAMOUS FURNITURE BRAND WARISAN.
PHOTO DASHA ALMAZOVA.

MATTHEW BATER has a timber business card that does not bend and crumple and bears the name of an inspiring Bali success story: Warisan.

The former London city financial whizz is now the third time – as a director and shareholder – in the finely tuned fork that is among Bali's best-known exports.

While Matthew maybe new to Bali, he has been with the outfit for years. He opened a Warisan Studio in Cape Town more than 10 years ago and in 2015 he opened Warisan Outdoor in South Africa. In fact, he went down the Warisan rabbit hole in 2005 while on holiday.

"The first time I came to Bali, I visited the Jimbaran showroom and bought some furniture and that ended up with me opening the studio in Cape Town, which is where I moved to after leaving London's financial sector where I had worked for 16 years," says Matthew.

It didn't take long for his role in South Africa to expand to the UK and include international marketing for the company that is virtually a household name in Italy and has an arresting roll call of exclusive retreats and hotels that possess their collections – including Four Seasons, Rosewood, Six Senses and Kudado in the Maldives.

Warisan founding partners Gianpaolo Nogara and Lucio Brissosole have been steering the company to great success over the past 29 years and now with consuming passions for boat building and surfing, they have long been whispering about stepping back from the daily running of the company.

"Last year Gianpaolo asked if I would consider moving to Bali to learn the management and move in to a role that takes the pressure off him and Lucio. It's now a three-way partnership," he says.

While Warisan is a much-loved Bali brand, it is the rapidly developing global hotel business that recognizes and embraces the outstanding quality and elegant designs of quality wooden furniture crafted in Indonesia.

"Furniture export is a very important industry in Indonesia so we will have to meet increasing demand and merchandise our Java factory. Every year fewer people are entering the traditional furniture making business, which is typically handed down from generation to generation in Indonesia. Now children are less likely to follow their father's craft as they have in the past. However, Warisan will never be fully mechanized but there is only so far we can grow and keep our range hand made," said Matthew.

The answer to this conundrum is to explore the computerization of the wood cutting stage of the process, which will compliment Warisan's

trademark hand finished style. It will be both traditional and efficient for growth.

It hasn't taken long for Matthew to take root in the business. In just a year he has contributed to expanding the Banguwangi factory in East Java by 10,000 square metres creating a space the size of three and a half rugby fields. A further 5,000 square metres has been added in Dalung which comprises the head office and the original factory. A total of 500 people work across the operation, including the landmark showroom on Jalan Raya Kerobokan near Seminyak.

This growth underpins Matthew's plans to push Warisan deeper into its core market of the hospitality business globally. He has targeted the USA, the Caribbean, the Maldives and the emerging markets of South America.

At a time when China is mass-producing furniture very cheaply, the team at Warisan is dedicated to their long-held philosophy of using only sustainable wood.

This unrivalled quality has attracted the interest of the rich and affluent from Indonesia to India with the company increasingly in demand to furnish the mansions of Mumbai and the apartments of the Jakarta elite – not to mention elegant expats.

The days of furniture buyers looking only for price point have all but disappeared with buyers from Asia more interested in excellent craftsmanship and sophistication – qualities that Warisan has in abundance.

When he is not growing factories and developing global business Matthew is reading about his new home.

"I've really been leaning about the culture of Bali and Java to understand how to interact with our workforce and have a handle on the local mores of the different social systems. It's good to embrace local cultures and the sooner the better."

He is supporting his investigations by learning Bahasa Indonesia twice a week in his office as well as enjoying the odd game of golf, the fabulous restaurants and outstanding lifestyle of our island paradise.

As with many choices that Gianpaolo Nogara and Lucio Brissosole have made since launching Warisan in 1989, time and consideration is key to their success and securing the skills of Matthew Bater aligns with that tradition.

"I really have bought into the ethos of the company in more ways than one."

www.warisan.com

MATTHEW BATER

