



JANET MOLLOY

STRIVING TO BE PART OF THE INDONESIAN DREAM

AUSTRALIAN Janet Molloy was a very early presence in the Ubud restaurant scene, which has recently climbed the charts as the new food star of Bali. Her first enterprise was selling homemade ice cream on Jalan Raya Ubud—the first in Bali. Janet opened Bumbu Bali in 1990, one of the first eateries to celebrate classic Balinese cuisine. At that time she had already lived in Bali for several years and was deeply immersed in the island's burgeoning food culture where the new is informed by the old. On a recent afternoon, I met up with Janet on the ornate terrace of her Café Havana, Bali's first Cuban-style restaurant and perhaps the only one in the world where the whole staff has been trained to dance salsa. While enjoying some tapas, sipping a raspberry *Corazon Batido*, with Cuban jazz in the background, a whiff of cigar smoke in the air and a cherry red 1963 Chevy Biscayne parked in front, I could easily imagine I was in Fidel Castro's Havana and the year was 1959.

How did you end up in Indonesia?

I first visited Bali as a tourist in 1976, and had a déjà vu experience. Stepping onto

the tarmac, I had an overwhelming sense of coming home. It touched my soul. I am blessed, because I still feel the same. I always joked that I was coming to Bali to sit under a coconut tree and relax (I didn't know that sitting under coconut trees was deadly dangerous!) My friend Sari said to me, "Mbak, you'll only sit for five minutes, then you'll start selling the coconuts." Her words have turned out to be so true.

But you ended up spending 26 years here!

In 1988, I met a Balinese who had been living in Australia for 10 years. We married, then returned to Bali to live. Life was very difficult and we started our first business with very little capital. In fact, the main "capital" I had was my experience, my willingness to work hard to feed my kids, and to create jobs for people in my adopted country. It's still something I strive for, even though sometimes Bali suffers reverses due to world economic situations that are beyond our control.

What do you think of Ubud's contemporary restaurant scene?

The restaurant scene in Ubud has been hopping lately with new and sophisticated restaurants opening all the time. The latest trend towards local, chemical-free health-



ier dining choices is wonderful. I wish I had time to try all the new places sprouting up. The ones that have soul have been my long time favorites - Maya, Cafe des Artistes, Uma, Lamak. My kids really love Piz-za Bagus! It's great to see small unique places thrive because of a great idea, attitude, or they fill a particular market. Sometimes I am shocked at how sophisticated some of the new restaurants in the Legian and Seminyak area are and how much money is invested there.

How did you dream up a Cuban Restaurant in Bali?

After (another!) mid-life crisis, I decided that I would overcome my greatest fear—dancing in public. I began taking salsa lessons with Made Beta, a superb Balinese dance teacher. I loved it so much I dreamt of a place where anybody could dance salsa, have wonderful Cuban-style dance partners, and enjoy delicious food any time they wanted. Solution? Open a Cuban style restaurant with a salsa-dancing staff!

Why this fascination with Cuba?

As a teenager during the Cuban missile crisis, it was apparent to me that the USA was bullying a small country. I felt sympathy for Cuba and the fascination grew as Cuba not only managed to remain independent but also started doing humanitarian work in other countries. Who doesn't admire the idealism of universal education and health care for all? The irony now is that Cubans are better off in this regard than US citizens.

Do Indonesians like Cuban food?

Although Cubans eat a lot of rice, cassava and sweet potatoes, like Indonesians, most Indonesians would find Cuban food too bland because recipes rarely use chilies. But dishes like paella, rice cooked in chicken broth with seafood and chicken, appeals to Indonesians. We serve *sambal pedas*, so guests can spice the dish up to suit their own tastes. Also, interestingly enough, tourists expect Cuban food to be hot and spicy, like Mexican food, forgetting that it is more Spanish influenced.

Is it difficult running your style of Cuban

Restaurant?

One of the main challenges was introducing such a foreign form of music and dance to Balinese, who already have such a strong tradition of music and dance. Men and women rarely have physical contact in traditional Balinese dance. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to expect Balinese to do Latin dances as sensually as Latinos do. However, now that they understand how much pleasure and fitness and laughter they and the guests can get from this type of dancing, we all have a great time. Guests often comment that they wish they too could get paid for dancing in such a happy work environment.

How do you like living in Indonesia?

That's simple—it's my home. For better or worse, I have become part of it and it is part of me. I love working with Indonesians. I wake up every day, excited to get to the office and see everyone, laugh and joke, and then start to work together. My policy has always been not to employ any foreigners. I have been granted the honor

of Indonesian citizenship so I feel I should put something back to repay that status. I am always thrilled to find my own staff enthusiastically taking on new projects and doing amazing work. I see my "job" is to identify each of my staff's particular talents and then create an environment for their own personal development.

Do you think that Indonesia has a bright future?

I dream of Indonesia one day creating a new and dynamic young leadership who put the society first, not personal gain and prestige. I dream of leaders with a vision who work to create a safe sustainable environment, offering universal free education instead of building silly statues and monuments. I dream of an Indonesia where a person's salary is enough to pay their children's school fees and cover getting their child's broken arm put in a cast, without them having to sell off their cows or rice fields. We all need to dream. If many people share the same dream, it will one day become a reality. ● BILL DALTON