

Popo Danes: Architect with a green conscience

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POPO DANES: (JP/Andra Wisnu)

Popo Danes is a multi-faceted, modern individual.

For the island's contemporary arts circles, he is known as a generous patron, who, through his Danes Art Veranda, has continuously provided ample space and strong support for the development of Bali's young, progressive and avant-garde artists.

For the island's rights activists, Popo is among the most ardent proponents of the establishment of a modern and democratic civil society.

For the local environmentalists, Popo is an articulate and influential voice, which tirelessly badgers the local administrations for better, eco-friendly development policies.

For Popo himself, he is just an architect, who believes that anybody can make a difference.

"It (the change) could be big or small, but any person can make an impact in the world," he told *The Jakarta Post*.

Popo chooses to make that change through his work as an architect.

"I am a Balinese and there are so many elements of Bali's traditional architecture that are in tune with the principles of energy conservation and environmental preservation, which modern architecture is still trying to achieve," he said.

"Being an environmentalist myself, I am committed to utilizing and integrating the eco-friendly characters of Bali's traditional architecture into my projects."

Born in Banyuwatis in North Bali, Popo graduated from Denpasar's Udayana University with a major in architecture. While still a student, he won an architectural design competition held by the Bali province.

In 1992, with a grant provided by the Rotary Foundation, he traveled to the Netherlands where he visited museums, design studios and construction sites.

In 1993, he established his own architecture design firm.

A large number of Popo's projects have been luxurious tourist resorts, upscale boutique hotels and opulent residential houses.

An early example of Popo's commitment to environmental conservation is the Natura Eco-Resort and Spa.

Popo purposefully and carefully designed the resort's compound so its construction and operation would cause minimum damage to the land, plants, trees and other natural features in the area.

Popo's pro-environmental approaches in creating architectural masterpieces later won him numerous contracts in various places in Asia and the Pacific.

"The projects in those places have given me valuable opportunities to learn about the traditional architecture of each area. One thing (each style) has in common is the intimate relationship with the surrounding natural environment," he said.

The international community recognized Popo's work in 2004 when the Natura Eco-Resort and Spa was honored with the ASEAN Energy Award. The same award was recently bestowed upon the Ubud Hanging Gardens Hotel (see page 21), another of Popo's creations.

The award was presented to Popo early in August during a gathering of architects in Bangkok.

"It was a very joyful moment. My works have twice been selected to represent Indonesia in this international competition and both times have succeeded in winning coveted awards," he said.

The awards, he added, were a clear testament that eco-friendly architectural works were gaining recognition on the global stage.

"Initially, many people saw my approach to architecture as an idealistic and somewhat naive approach. The awards have proven that the approach works," he said.

Aside from the ASEAN Energy Awards, Popo has received several other commendations, including the Indonesian Architecture Award for Building Conservation, the Indonesian Architecture Citation for Commercial Design, and the Indonesian Institute of Architecture Award.

Popo said many Indonesian architects still didn't have the courage to utilize the country's legacy of traditional architecture in their modern projects.

"They design buildings that imitate buildings abroad -- completely-sealed skyscrapers that consume a huge amount of energy to power their lamps, air conditioning and other electrical appliances," he said.