

Designing Paradise Episode Synopsis

Ep 1 - It's all about Bensley in Bangkok: We peek behind the scenes with Bill at Baan Botanical, his home and amazing tropical garden and also at play in his studio, the former Iraqi Embassy, where dozens of designers happily work through the myriad of steps that it takes to make some of the world's best hotels. Bensley is opinionated as they come, and laments the loss of Thai charm it held when he arrived thirty five years ago, but offers a solution by way of hospitality... the Siam Hotel on the banks of the Chao Phraya.

Ep 2 - Lamarck puts on the dog?: On the sparsely populated tropical island off the coast of Cambodia Bensley has reconstructed and renovated the C19th Lamarck University grounds into Asia's most unique resort; JW Marriott Phuquoc. So it's back to school in Vietnam and a stunning hotel on the southern tip of the Island Phu Quoc themed as the Lamarck University. This is a vast project has taken 5 years of planning. We know Bensley doesn't like big hotels. But here he has had to be clever, so with bigger structures based on a the original universities footprint Bill creates landscape gardens with supersized monuments to trick the mind into believing the campus buildings are smaller than they actually are. But does it work?

Ep 3 - Fishing rods?: Was JAYAVARMAN the most handsome of the Khmer kings? Well he certainly thought so! Bensley honors, in a most contemporary way, Jayavarman with the new Shinta Mani Angkor Bensley Collection. He claims that the future of super high end travel is about providing experiences and 100% private outdoor garden spaces for the guests to enjoy as they like. Nudge nudge, wink wink? This tiny noteworthy hotel provides both, in spades, while most importantly they have helped the Khmer community in more ways than we can possibly cover in this episode.

Ep 4 - Shop 'til you drop and "poof" a new hotel is born?: In the name of recycling, Bensley scours the worlds' markets collecting historically correct antiquities to renovate the 1898 built hill station of Auguste Pavie, the first Governor-General of the French Protectorate of Laos. The minuscule 24 key Rosewood in the UNESCO protected town of Luang Prabang is an eclectic combination of colonial architecture and hill tribe tents, which, room by room, unveils the fascinating history of Laos, if he can open it before the first guests arrive!

Ep 5 - Pachyderm Paradise: Located just off the Mekong in the Golden Triangle of opium fame, Bensley has set up camp for the most expensive Four Seasons a home to a maximum of 30 happy campers and 26 very lucky relocated street elephants set free in the resorts wild country. Lauded three years in a row as the #1 hotel in the world, Bensley explains why, and enjoys his favorite camp as much, and perhaps more than any of the other guests.

Ep 6 - Luxury is Dead: Disheartened, long time Baliophile, Bensley is fed up with the rampant overbuilding of the Island of the Gods but offers fellow architects an environmentally suitable solution by way of his latest eco camp hidden in the dense jungles of Ubud. Capella Ubud also teaches the little known fact that Holland invaded Bali on numerous occasions to capture slaves but were thwarted each and every time. Bensley's newest hotel is a tongue in cheek acknowledgement of the Dutch blunders. But is that way too strange?

Ep 7 - Love hate relationships: Rajasthan is not the easiest place in India to build a five star palace. Bensley struggles, but sticks to his unique DNA methods and works with the strengths of the local craftsmen to create one of the world's most treasured accommodations. But will you love the results?

Ep 8 - Tree Hugger!: Bensley is bonkers about saving each and every one of the 854 coconut trees that occupies this pristine bay in Koh Samui, Thailand. In the end, coconuts penetrate, in the most amusing ways, and in all aspects of the resort, and his philosophy of minimal intervention prevails in a most sexy manner. Will the results stimulate other professionals to follow suit?

Ep 9 - Wiped clean: Tran Nhan was regarded as an intelligent king in the 13th century as he left the comfort of his palace and surprised all by becoming a Buddhist monk. Yen Tu Mountai, his last resting place, attracts millions of Buddhist pilgrims yearly wishing for better fortune which resulted in a free for all of building and typical Vietnamese chaos. Bensley took charge, cleared the slate and the chaos, and actually implemented a huge master plan that resulted in visual harmony and simplicity of the 13th century that works for all parties... including the Communists?

Ep 10 - Rock On: "What we build as architects will never NEVER, be as good as what Mother Nature has given us. Our job is to mitigate the damage that we cause to the natural landscape when we build to the wishes of our clients" says the determined Bensley. In this episode *the not so Bonkers Bensley* explains his methodical techniques of minimal intervention and how that shaped Seychelles most exclusive boutique resort. Is this critical to the resorts future or just green wash?

Ep 11 - Rice fields forever: Bensley designed this Asian classic hotel, Four Seasons Chiang Mai, in 1992 and since then has been employed as the visual policeman to maintain and renovate. This episode catches Bensley planning the latest batch of renovations and he also visits his favorite local cache of antiques. Can the old dame of Chiang Mai still wear her lipstick well?

Ep 12 - Paint the town yellow?: Shrouded in clouds and perched in one of the highest colonial hill stations in Indochina, Bensley has designed from scratch the Hotel de la Coupole of chaotic Sapa, Vietnam. He explores the relationship of the fashions of the indigenous hill tribes are juxtaposed with those of the haute couture in 1900's Paris. As a hotel theme will that bonkers idea work? Has the daft bugger gone too far this time?

Ep 13 - Growing the conservation footprint: The pressures of growing populations surrounding the *bigger than Central Park* land concession in the Cardamon National Park to continue poaching wild life and log illegally presents Bensley perhaps his most challenging project of his life. How does he find the compromise between hungry locals and the staunch conservationists? Forbes Magazine writes that the Shinta Mani Wild Bensley Collection is the most anticipated hotel opening of 2018, but can Bensley deliver?