

# THE STORYTELLER

## 說故事的人

Bill Bensley, the designer who reinvented the Southeast Asia resort, turns 60 this month. As his wildest and quirkiest project opens in Cambodia, CAROLYN BEASLEY pays him, and it, a visit

為東南亞度假村酒店帶來新面貌的Bill Bensley本月慶祝60大壽，Carolyn Beasley前往柬埔寨，走訪這位設計師及他迄今最充滿奇思妙想的作品

Bill Bensley is adamant: 'Luxury as we knew it is stone-cold dead!' He's not the first person in the hospitality industry to make that remark, or something like it. But as the man who has done more than anyone else to redefine the luxury hotel resort in Southeast Asia, it sounds like Elon Musk saying there's not much of a future for electric cars.

From Phuket to Da Nang, Indonesia to Cambodia, in partnership with Rosewood or the InterContinental, JW Marriott or the Four Seasons, the name Bill Bensley is a guarantee that your accommodation is going to have more than a touch of verve, glamour and irreverence. He's taken the familiar regional, pared-down aesthetic (thatched roofs, rooms on stilts, open-air lobbies, daybeds) and added mosaics, columns, mirrors, art deco graphics and his signature big, bold black and white swirls. (Until Bensley came along, monochrome was exclusively an urban hotel phenomenon.)

Still, he doesn't like 'luxury'. What else doesn't he like? 'Beach resorts. And I don't like big hotels.'

So if he's no longer in the business of luxury, big hotels and beach resorts – what business is he in?

'Storytelling. Storytelling in hospitality' ②

Bill Bensley堅信：「我們所熟悉的豪華享受已死，猶如冰冷僵硬的石頭一般！」在酒店業內，雖然他並非第一個提出這種看法的人，但他在重塑東南亞豪華度假酒店方面曾作出重大貢獻，這番話出自他的口中，聽來就像Elon Musk宣告電動車沒有未來一樣嚴重。

從布吉、峴港、印尼到柬埔寨，分別與瑰麗酒店、洲際酒店、JW萬豪酒店及四季酒店合作，Bill Bensley這個名字保證帶來的住宿體驗，絕不限於展現活力與魅力，以及高人一等的品味。他採用當地常見物料，如茅草屋頂、高架屋、露天大堂及躺椅等，加入馬賽克、廊柱、鏡子、裝飾藝術圖案，以及他的招牌設計巨大的黑白漩渦圖形，構成獨特的審美風格。在Bensley之前，只有位於市區的酒店才會採用黑白設計。

可是，他並不喜歡「豪華享受」。還有什麼是他不喜歡的？「海灘度假村酒店。我也不喜歡大型酒店。」

然而如果他不再參與豪華、大型酒店和海灘度假村酒店項目，那麼他從事的是哪一類業務？

他說：「說故事。我的下一步行動是透過酒店說故事。」就以他在越南西南海岸的新項目富國島翡翠灣JW萬豪度假酒店為例，以外行人的眼光來看，這不過是一間豪華的大型海灘酒店，但Bensley卻令它回歸這個地方原來的初衷：一個學習的地點。

Bensley說：「酒店的背景故事是翻」 ①







#### If these walls could talk

JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Resort & Spa (top left and middle); Rosewood Luang Prabang (left and bottom)

#### 會說故事的房間

富國島翡翠灣JW萬豪度假酒店（左上圖及中圖）；琅勃拉邦瑰麗酒店（左圖及下圖）



is my next big move,’ he says. Take the JW Marriott Phu Quoc Emerald Bay Resort & Spa, off Vietnam’s southwest coast. To the untrained eye it looks like – well, a big luxury beach hotel. But Bensley went back to the site’s origins: a place of learning.

‘It’s the refurbishment of Lamarck University that was built in 1880. I broke this hotel down into 27 different departments, from the chemistry department to zoology, so all the rooms are different,’ says Bensley.

‘Now I’m designing the uniforms, the music and all the graphics, telling the story right down to the last teaspoon.’

Bensley’s Rosewood hotel in Luang Prabang, Laos, was one of 2018’s most high-profile openings.

‘Each of the 23 rooms tells a story, too,’ Bensley says. ‘I’ve got 2,500 artefacts documenting the lives of different personalities that were influential in Laos from 1855 all the way up to 1910, including the “Playboy King” of Laos, Sisavang Vong.’

Maybe it’s time to tell Bensley’s own story.

Born 60 years ago this month in Anaheim, California, he earned pocket money tending to and redesigning his neighbours’ gardens. His love of learning was sparked by his father, a prototype research mechanic who built parts of the *Gemini* shuttles that went to the moon. He studied landscape architecture at California State Polytechnic University before taking a masters in landscape architecture and urban design at Harvard.

In 1984, Bensley pivoted east. He joined a Harvard classmate, Lek Bunnag, in Singapore. For three years he cut his teeth in hotel design, before moving to Hong Kong and then, in 1989, to Bangkok. Bensley met his now husband and business partner, Jirachai Rengthong, during his first week in Thailand. ‘It took at least a month before he would go on a date with me.’

And so to the latest chapter of the Bensley story. The setting is unlikely: deep in the Cambodian rainforest in the

Southern Cardamom National Park.

Across the trail, three hardwood trees lie freshly sliced open with the best timber removed, while four rudimentary traps designed to catch civets are propped nearby. This is poacher country.

I’m on patrol – not something hotel guests get to say very often. A man pops out of the forest near us. My heart pounds. Team leader Rethy Sowath with NGO Wildlife Alliance confronts the poacher, searching his bag. Today, the bag is empty.

Poaching is a life-and-death industry, and not just for the animals. Controlled by a mafia-like underworld, this is a multibillion-dollar industry in Southeast

型研究工程師，曾參與建造飛往月球的雙子星號太空船。受到父親啟發，他對學習產生濃厚興趣。他在加州州立理工大學修讀景觀建築，其後前往哈佛大學攻讀景觀建築和城市設計碩士學位。

1984年，Bensley決定往亞洲發展。他加入哈佛同學Lek Bunnag在新加坡的公司，初次嘗試酒店設計。三年後他前往香港，然後在1989年移居曼谷。Bensley在泰國的第一個星期結識了現在的伴侶及商業夥伴Jirachai Rengthong。「至少花了一個月的時間，Jirachai才答應跟我約會。」

現在翻到Bensley故事最新的一章，不過地點卻令人意想不到，是位於柬埔寨雨林深處的Southern Cardamom National Park國家公園。

穿過一條小徑，地上橫臥著三棵剛剛被砍下的硬木樹，樹幹中間最上乘的木材已被挖走，附近放著四個設計原始、用於捕捉麝香貓的陷阱。這是一個盜獵盛行的國家。

我正在巡邏（酒店客人很少會這樣說）。一個男人突然從我們身旁的森林走出來。我的心跳加速。志願組織Wildlife Alliance的隊長Rethy Sowath懷疑他是盜獵者，要求搜查他的袋子，不過結果袋內空無一物。

盜獵是一門生死攸關的行業，涉及的不只是野生動物的生命。在東南亞，這是價值數十億美元的大生意，受當地黑社會控制。Rethy在褲後袋插了一把大刀，他的同事則手持AK-47步槍守護隊伍前進。

我在豪華酒店Shinta Mani Wild-Bensley Collection加入這支巡邏隊伍。酒店距離金邊西南三小時車程，坐落在一片面積350公頃的私人土地上；這片土地位於三個國家公園之間，形成一條野生動物走廊。

但這只是Shinta Mani Wild故事的一部分。為了創出他心目中的「故事」，Bensley改寫了一個1960年代典型的文化衝突故事。當越戰進行得如火如荼之際，美國第一夫人積琪蓮甘迺迪於1967年訪問柬埔寨西哈努克親王。Bensley以這個冷戰時期奇怪的外交事件為靈感，想出了一個虛擬的故事情節：假如這兩位主人翁決定一起踏上狩獵之旅，那麼這間度假酒店會是什麼樣子？

Shinta Mani Wild共設有15個豪華帳篷，分佈於綿延1.5公里、佈滿巨礫的河

## “ I’M TELLING THE STORY DOWN TO THE LAST TEASPOON

我說的故事細節詳盡，連  
一隻小茶匙亦包括在內

新於1880年成立的Lamarck University大學。我將酒店規劃成27個學院，從化學到動物學學院，所以每個房間都各不相同。」

「現在我正在設計制服、音樂和所有平面設計，從頭到尾細訴整個故事，小至一隻茶匙亦包括在內。」

由他設計的老撾琅勃拉邦瑰麗酒店是2018年最引人注目的新酒店之一。

Bensley說：「這裡總共有23個房間，各自陳述一個故事。我收集了2,500件文物，記錄了幾位從1855年到1910年對老撾影響深遠的人物的生活，包括後宮妃嬪如雲的『花花公子國王』Sisavang Vong。」

現在也許應該講一下Bensley本人的故事了。

他在60年前的2月出生於加州Anaheim。小時候，他為鄰居打理及重新設計花園賺取零用錢。他的父親是一名原





“

## FOR THOSE THAT DARE, A 320-METRE ZIPLINE DELIVERS GUESTS DIRECTLY TO THE LANDING ZONE BAR

具有冒險精神的客人可以鋼索在高空滑行320米  
到達接待區LANDING ZONE BAR

Asia. Rethy carries a large knife on his hip, while his colleague guards the team with an AK-47 rifle.

I joined this patrol from the luxury hotel Shinta Mani Wild – Bensley Collection, three hours' drive southwest of Phnom Penh. The hotel sits within 350 hectares of private land that forms a wildlife corridor between three national parks.

But that's only one part of the Shinta Mani Wild story. To arrive at his 'story', Bensley upturned a tale of classic 1960s culture clash. In 1967, with the Vietnam War raging, Jackie Kennedy paid a visit to Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk. Bensley has taken this strange episode of Cold War diplomacy and run with it: the resort invokes what it might've been like had the pair decided to travel on safari.

Shinta Mani Wild consists of 15 luxury tents, set along one and a half kilometres of boulder-strewn river, each tent decorated with artefacts like travelling chests, a botanical press and vintage sewing machines. Bensley treads lightly with his low-volume hotel, while generating revenue for conservation.

He says 'Wild' (as he likes to call the hotel) is not super-luxe. Although, with pop-up bars above waterfalls, personal 'adventure butlers' and unlimited spa treatments, there are certainly no hardships here.

The most outlandish of the Shinta Mani Wild experiences is the arrival at reception. For those that dare, a 320-metre zipline delivers guests directly to the Landing Zone Bar.

'Wild is meant to ease guests out of that expected comfort zone, into a place of exploration and learning,' Bensley explains. 'It is important to step off that zipline platform some 12 storeys in the air, sail above a healthy canopy of rainforest and then over our most beautiful waterfall – you know why? Because you'll remember that for as long as you live.'

Despite enormous difficulties in building this remote hotel, Bensley counts Shinta Mani Wild as one of his career highlights for what it can achieve for the local people. The hotel is the culmination of everything Bensley has learnt and everything he loves.

Bensley's business partner, Sokoun Chanpreda, outbid logging companies to secure this land. To protect the forest, Bensley and Sokoun started their own hotel, providing locals with alternative incomes to poaching. Two-thirds of the staff come from surrounding villages.

'Shinta Mani Wild is, for me, a way to teach Cambodians that conservation is more valuable than extraction,' Bensley says. The hotel also funds its own rangers that patrol the private reserve and adjacent national parks.

Another career highlight for Bensley was his first camp, the Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai, Thailand. On this site, he took inspiration from Botswana, and tied the low-impact resort to the rehabilitation of elephants rescued from begging on the streets of Bangkok.

Originally known for designing Balinese landscapes for hotels, Bensley now prefers to design the architecture, landscapes and interiors. His first integrated design was the Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, Thailand, which he still regards fondly.

'It was here I developed my theory of minimal intervention, understanding ☺

### Gone wild

Shinta Mani Wild maximises its natural setting for guests (opposite); Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, Chiang Rai (bottom right)

### 野外風光

Shinta Mani Wild 充分利用環境讓客人體驗自然氣息 (對頁) ; 清萊金三角四季帳篷酒店 (右下圖)

畔，每個帳篷內以各種文物裝飾，如旅行箱、壓製植物標本的工具和古董縫紉機等。Bensley設計的低密度酒店盡量減少對環境的破壞，並且以酒店的收入來支持環境保護。

他表示，這間被他暱稱為「Wild」的酒店並不是超級豪華，但瀑布上設有臨時酒吧，還有為個人服務的「歷奇管家」和各式水療護理，客人肯定可以在這裡輕鬆享受悠閒時光。

Shinta Mani Wild體驗最奇特之處是抵達接待處的方式。具有冒險精神的客人可選擇以鋼索在高空滑行320米到達接待區Landing Zone Bar。

Bensley解釋道：「Wild的目的是要讓客人遠離意料之內的舒適區，進入一個探索和學習的領域。從約12層樓高的滑索平台踏出去，飛越茂密的雨林樹冠及這裡最美麗的瀑布非常重要，為什麼要這樣做？因為這個經歷會讓你畢生難忘。」

儘管建造這偏遠酒店的過程困難重重，但Bensley將Shinta Mani Wild造福當地人視為事業生涯的巔峰之一。這間酒店是Bensley集所學、所愛於一身的最極致表現。

Bensley的商業夥伴Sokoun Chanpreda以高於伐木公司提出的價格取得這塊土地。為了保護森林，Bensley和Sokoun決定創立酒店，為當地人提供收入，取代盜獵。酒店有三分之二的員工都是鄰近村莊的村民。

Bensley表示：「對我來說，Shinta Mani Wild是教育柬埔寨民眾明白保護比捕獵更寶貴的方式。」除了提供就業機會，酒店還出資聘請護林員在私人保護區和鄰近的國家公園內巡邏。

Bensley的另一個出色成就是其首間奢華營地酒店：位於泰國清萊的金三角四季帳篷酒店。他從非洲國家博茨瓦納汲取靈感，並將這間對環境影響極低的度假酒店結合關懷大象行動，拯救在曼谷街頭向人乞討的大象。

Bensley最初透過為酒店設計峇里式園景打開知名度，但現在他更喜歡設計建築、景觀和室內佈置。泰國蘇梅島四季度假酒店是他首次嘗試綜合式設計的作品，至今仍是深愛的項目。☺

Photos: Fishing guide: Elise Hassey





## Connect and excel in Asia's world city



what the site will allow you to put on it without affecting it environmentally.' He preserved all 856 coconut trees that existed on the site through a system that allowed trees to penetrate buildings.

In 2019, Bensley's creativity pushes new boundaries.

'Wild' certainly is quirky. Perhaps just quirky enough to save a forest.

And Bensley does own up to 'a rather quirky sense of aesthetics'. The good news is that the giant hotel brands and their billionaire owners are anything but a brake on his creativity. The days of the Asian kit resort are numbered.

'What I am learning,' he says, 'through a positive response to my wackiness, is that perhaps my quirks are not quirky enough.'

「我就是在這裡發展出低度干預的理論，對酒店所在地有所了解，讓你知道如何在不影響環境的情況下開發土地。」他以一套讓樹木貫穿建築物的系統，保留了當時所有在工地生長的856棵椰子樹。

Bensley的創造力在2019年將會進一步邁向新境界。

「Wild」肯定異於一般的酒店，也許剛好怪異得足以拯救一座森林。

而Bensley確實擁有「一種頗為古怪的審美觀」，但值得慶幸的，是這些知名的大型酒店品牌及其身家億萬的富豪業主絕不會阻止他發揮創造力，而風格千篇一律的亞洲度假村酒店此後應會逐漸被淘汰。

他說：「從我這些古怪設計獲得的正面回應來看，我想也許我的設計仍然不夠古怪。」

Au naturel  
Open-air bathing at  
Shinta Mani Wild

天然原貌  
Shinta Mani Wild的  
戶外浴室



A destination that offers unparalleled connectivity to China, Asia & the rest of the world ...  
within a 5-hour flight of half the world's population ...  
new bridge & high-speed rail link to Mainland China ...  
premier international business & financial centre ...  
non-stop entertainment & cultural delights ...  
a safe cosmopolitan city where east meets west.  
Where else but Hong Kong, Asia's world city.  
Join us to connect and excel.



www.brandhk.gov.hk



## FIVE HOTELS WITH THE BENSLEY QUIRK Bensley的五大奇趣之作



**1 InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula Resort, Vietnam – high concept or what?** Spread across four levels – one each for the 'kingdoms of Heaven, Sky, Earth and Sea' – linked by the hotel's own funicular railway, and lying in a vast monkey forest above a secret bay.

**2 Capella Ubud, Bali, Indonesia – integration with nature.** The hotel hides in the jungle and, as Bensley says, 'Bali is so totally overbuilt, no one there needs another in-your-face architectural icon.'

**3 The Siam, Bangkok, Thailand – embracing the neighbourhood.** Constructed as a new build in the capital's historical quarter, The Siam takes guests back to 19th century Bangkok.

**4 Rosewood Luang Prabang, Laos – teaching guests something new.** 'I love the idea that even a small hotel can be designed to be a historically accurate capsule story of a whole country.'

**5 Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui, Thailand – innovation to protect nature.** Bensley mocked up each building in bamboo first before construction. 'This allowed us to really work the guest rooms in between the trees,' he says.

Bensley (左圖)說：「我們的客戶全都要一個比上一次更出色的設計，因此，我竭盡全力，令我每個設計看起來截然不同。」Bensley的項目並不追求外觀統一，卻忠實地體現了一個他堅信不移的元素，他說可以總結為一個重要的詞語，就是「尊重」。除了Shinta Mani Wild，以下是五間Bensley最喜歡的酒店及其蘊藏的特質。

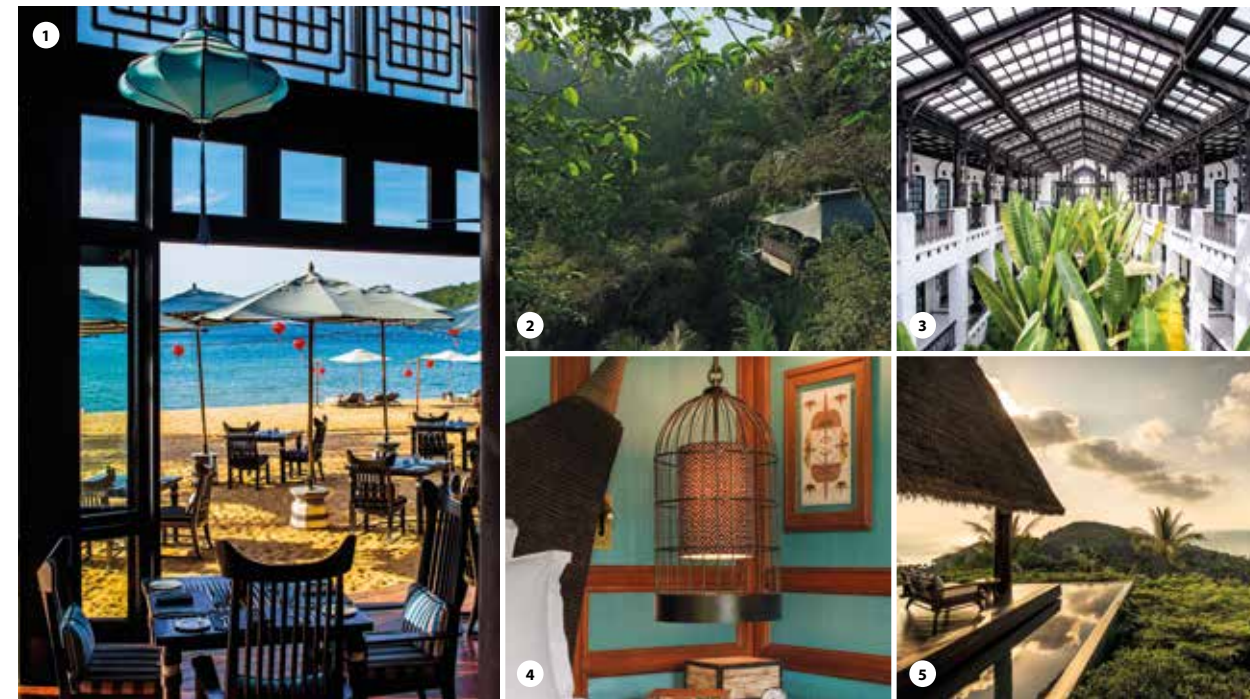
**1 越南峴港洲際陽光半島度假酒店**是以高概念取勝嗎？藏身於位置隱秘的海灣上方及猴群聚居的廣闊密林之中，依次劃分為天堂、天空、大地和海洋等四個王國，並以酒店自設的有軌纜車連接各層區。

**2 印尼峇里島烏布嘉佩樂酒店**與自然融為一體。酒店隱藏在叢林之中，正如Bensley所說：「峇里島已經蓋了太多酒店，那裡不需要另一個醒目搶眼的建築地標。」

**3 泰國曼谷The Siam酒店擁抱社區。**坐落在歷史城區的新建築，The Siam酒店將客人帶回19世紀的曼谷。

**4 老撾琅勃拉邦瑰麗酒店**讓客人學習新事物。Bensley說：「即使是一家小型酒店，亦可設計成一個真實反映整個國家歷史的故事縮影，我喜歡這樣的想法。」

**5 泰國蘇梅島四季度假酒店**以創新方式保護大自然。Bensley在施工前先以竹子仿製每棟建築物。他說：「這樣有助我們於樹木之間建造客房。」



Photos: Bensley with kids: Shinta Mani Wild; Capella Ubud; Devandra Djelantik