

Green School, in Indonesia, combines traditional methods with exercises in ecology and agriculture in an earth-friendly setting

# School sows the seeds of a 'green' generation



Founded in 2008 by Canadian John Hardy and wife, Cynthia, the Green School is nestled in a tropical grove near Ubud, Indonesia. AFP

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**T**ODAY'S young students, not the world leaders at UN climate talks in Copenhagen, will be the ones battling to save the planet if predictions of catastrophic temperature rises come true.

And few may be better equipped to deal with that nightmare than graduates of a unique eco-school on the Indonesian island of Bali, where an innovative curriculum has been designed to produce future "stewards of the environment".

Founded last year by Canadian John Hardy and his American wife, Cynthia, the Green School is nestled in a tropical grove near Ubud, in the centre of an island better known for

this is actually a schoolyard.

And so it unfolds: a school made entirely of bamboo, with open classrooms covered by roofs of alang-alang; a campus dotted by crops and edible plants like fragrant lemon grass and papayas; and John Hardy, sitting in a sarong and sandals and explaining that it is time to "bring the kids back to the Earth".

"Green School is like a seed for the future, something that will grow in spirit," Hardy says, over a cool drink made from fresh ginger that has been grown by the students.

"We are teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but we are doing it in a completely 'green' environment. My belief is that this affects the heart of the child and we will end up with 'green' beings."

The Hardys, 30-year resi-

statement promises to deliver a "generation of global citizens who are knowledgeable about and inspired to take responsibility for the sustainability of the world".

In addition to core subjects such as maths and literacy, which are based on the Cambridge International General Certificate in Secondary Education, the school offers ecology studies and "mud-between-the-toes" activities tailored to each age-group.

Experiential learning is encouraged through the growing of crops and projects involving aquatic systems, awareness of waste and water usage, animal care, sustainable building and renewable energy.

Teachers and students use self-composting toilets, and a biodiesel generator supplies most of the school's electricity.

boo, a plant that grows all over Bali.

"Bamboo comes out of the ground like a train, and three years later you can use it as timber. We need quick solutions and bamboo is a quick solution," Hardy says.

However, it has not been easy getting the Green School off the ground. In the very early stages there were teacher resignations and some unsatisfied parents pulled their children out.

The Hardys responded quickly and brought in Englishman Ronald Stones, a decorated veteran of 24 years teaching at international schools around Asia, to sort things out.

The new school director says teething pains are over.

"No one has done this before, so we are writing the book as we go along," Stones says, adding that once the Hardys approached him he knew he had to leave conventional schooling behind.

"Education that is more of the same just isn't going to work. Education knows it has to do something [about instilling environmental awareness in children], but it doesn't know what or how..."

"What I'm trying to do is shake people a little bit."

Stones says Green School graduates will be prepared for higher learning at any university in the world, even where the science of climate change is being debated and challenged.

Student president Rahul Bothra, 13, of Germany, says he has lost weight and stopped watching so much television since he joined Green School last year when his family moved from Thailand to Bali.

"It's lots of fun, a big change to what I was used to," he says.

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its luxury beachside resorts.

From the main road through Badung village, visitors follow a stone path to the banks of the Ayung River that runs through the 8-hectare campus.

The only man-made structure visible at what amounts to the school gate is a 42-metre bamboo bridge with a sweeping roof made of traditional grass slats known locally as alang-alang.

Following the path on the other side of the bridge, the hypnotic humming of cicadas and the gurgling of the Ayung is suddenly broken by children's laughter, the first reminder that

dents of Bali, provided the start-up capital for the school through the sale of their jewellery business in 2007.

Opened in September last year, the school has around 150 students from 23 countries, ranging from grades one to nine.

Grades 10-12 are scheduled to be added next year and eventually the Hardys plan to create what Cynthia describes as a "learning village" and "knowledge hub" for anyone concerned about climate change and their carbon footprint.

Green School's mission

The plan is to take the school "off the grid", using solar panels and a hydropower unit connected to the river.

Paris-based group Akuo Energy, which secures debt financing for renewable energy projects around the world, is backing the school and may assist with a "renewable energy lab" for the children, said chief executive Eric Scotto.

The central "Heart of School" building is one of the biggest bamboo structures in the world, with three dome-like roofs thatched with spiralling alang-alang and supported by 17-metre pieces of solid bam-

AFP