

Setting a new standard

Someone has always got to take the first step; in terms of green buildings and diplomacy, it will be Austria that will first take on the challenge of building green in Jakarta. **Jacqueline Wales** reports.



Austria really is a world away from Jakarta. It is a small country in central Europe sandwiched between Germany, Italy and Hungary with just 8.3 million people. High rolling mountains, woodland and forests with "lakes so clean you can swim and drink the water at the same time," cover the landscape.

More than 10,000 kilometres away, Austria will build its first "green" embassy here in Jakarta.

"Everybody tells me it's one year, 12 months, 365 days until it is completed, so I'm inclined now to believe that it's feasible," says Austrian Ambassador to Indonesia Klaus Wolfer, in his third year of service in Jakarta.

Austria is committed to green principles. A fifth of the country's energy is generated using sustainable sources via wind, solar and hydro-electric power and they intend to increase this by another 20% by 2020.

"There is a desire from our government to promote modern and sensible ecological buildings, so it makes sense that new government buildings are built to respect these principles," he says.

A jury of six that included two Indonesian architects selected the ambitious green design, the vision of architect Fritz Oetl of Pos Architects, from a small group of competitive proposals.

"It was a unanimous decision on the design, which is a very good sign. It's a very positive way to start the project."

GRAND PLANS

The building plan applies a new approach to sustainable architecture in a tropical climate. To save energy and water, double-glazed windows, solar panels and a rainwater storage system will be installed.

Shaded windows, an air-tight shell and high thermal insulation means lower temperatures inside when it's still 30 degrees outside. "Architects often explain it as the refrigerator principle," explains Wolfer. "The fridge is well insulated so it keeps the cool in and throws out the warmth."

This innovative design will reduce the building's carbon emissions by 85% compared with a standard office building and will generate 22per cent of its total electricity consumption using solar technology.

The ambassador is confident the embassy will set a new benchmark for others in Jakarta. "We have to show it's possible to build green." As well as being green, this new construction is modern and creative with its design resembling a collection of large concrete boxes stacked and molded together. The exterior security walls will be masked with thick canopy of bamboo.

"It has to respect security principles - we are an embassy after all - but we've tried to find a way of maintaining security that doesn't appear intimidating."

Wolfer is now approaching his fourth year as ambassador to Indonesia – the usual period for such a posting. “I’d like to stay on, though, to see this project through,” he says.

CLEAR VISION

Before arriving in Jakarta, Wolfer had represented his home country in embassies from Rome, Serbia, and Budapest to Croatia, but his connections with the city have for many years been close by.

“My wife is a Jakartan,” he says. The two met and married in Europe and now have two

young children who both speak Bahasa Indonesia, “So being posted here has been a good experience, especially for my children.”

Wolfer made the decision to pursue a career as a diplomat early on. “I was born in Vienna but grew up in Burgenland on the eastern border. This was at a time when the political landscape in central Europe was dramatically changing with the opening of the “Iron Curtain” between Hungary and Austria and then the fall of the Berlin wall.

“Those kinds of experiences, and accounts of what happened did have an effect,” he says. After graduating from Vienna University in law studies, Wolfer wasted no time in enrolling at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna.

As a diplomat his job has meant dealing with some very tense political situations, including in the 1990s, working for the Federal



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▲ Ambassador Wolfer is keen to blaze a green trail for other diplomats and embassies to follow



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs political department in Vienna dealing with the Balkan wars, but this ambassador also has a keen eye for the arts.

Immediately before taking his position in Jakarta, Wolfer was the head of the Directorate General for the Arts in the Prime Minister’s Office back home in Austria. “I do have a fondness for the arts,” he says, adding that for a period in Rome he also served as director of the Austrian Cultural Institute in Rome. He has certainly taken notice of the unique artistic abilities of the Indonesian people.

“The visual arts, the design of the textiles in Indonesia is incredible; there is a sense of beauty and creativity that is not limited to a certain person or top artists but almost ingrained in the population.”

It’s no surprise then that his favored city in Indonesia is Yogyakarta, “and Borobudur is spectacular.”

Eventually, but not before the new green embassy is complete, it will be time for Wolfer to move on. “I like the fast pace of Indonesia; everything is always moving,” he says, “I like the optimism that is in the air ... but I’m always open to the next place I’m going to go.”

At least though, the ambassador and his team here in Jakarta will have laid the way for green architecture in Jakarta and set a new example for future diplomats and embassies to follow. ◊