

# HIGH PROFILE



THE MAGAZINE OF **PAGCOR** / PHILIPPINE AMUSEMENT AND GAMING CORPORATION / [WWW.PAGCOR.PH](http://WWW.PAGCOR.PH) / ISSUE 6 – SUMMER 2010

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**Georgina Wilson**

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**WHO IS THE NEW  
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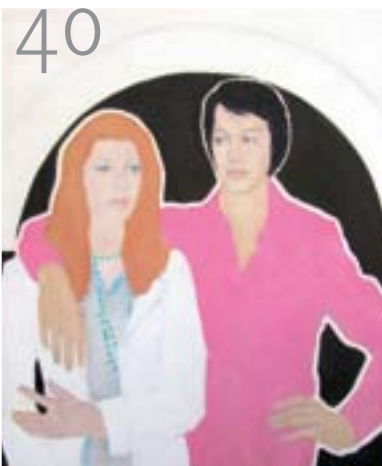
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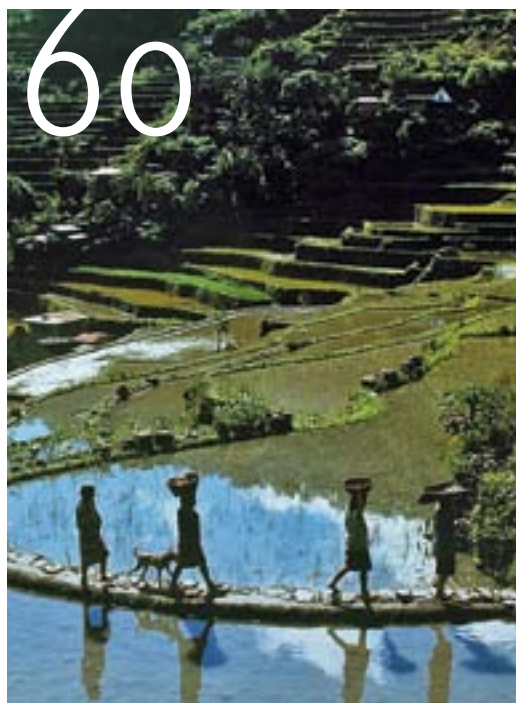
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Cover Photo: Mark Nicdao  
Previous Page - Portrait of Ramon & Silvana Diaz by Isabel Diaz.



### ERRATUM

Featured in our spring 2010 issue in the article on arnis entitled *Fighting Spirit*, Dominador Vince Lera and Raffy Montalbo (pictured above) belong to the school of Grand Master Charlie Villanueva. According to Raymond Velayo, President of Arnis Philippines (the 33rd member of the Philippine Olympic Committee) there are about 1.5 million people who currently practice arnis in the Philippines and not 200,000 as published in our spring issue. Arnis Philippines embraces and welcomes all styles of arnis.

### Our thanks to:

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**The Manila Polo Club**

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# EDITORIAL



One of the best things that could have happened in the Philippines has happened: the country navigated through a presidential election without major glitches. In a highly connected world where investors can bring down an economy overnight by pulling the plug, the Philippines has re-established itself as an example of democracy and placed itself in a favorable position in the region.

That doesn't mean the country should rest on its laurels, but what matters at the moment is that it looks increasingly mature in the eyes of the international community, something which is already turning into real investments and not only praise. The local stock market is up, the forecast for economic growth looks rosy and leaders from different quarters seem willing to rally behind the state as a whole.

As a consequence, the mood in the country is upbeat and people are riding the wave of change with gusto. They move fast in the streets, they travel, they blog and text, work hard and play hard. The Philippines could finally be coming of age, and writer Yvette Tan muses on the role that youth is playing in this new-found maturity.

In this issue we have dedicated a great number of pages to the beauty that we constantly find in the Philippines: two travel pieces cover both the land and the seas through stunning photography; a 10-page pictorial reveals some of the legends and myths that combine native culture with Spanish influence; and one of the country's top models, Georgina Wilson, embodies the queens of a deck of cards through the talented vision of photographer Mark Nicdao, art designer Raffy Tesoro and stylist Bea Constantino.

"Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others," Winston Churchill said once. As a new government takes office this summer, we wish the Philippines continued success in its achievements.

*Marco Venditti*  
Managing Editor



# CONTRIBUTORS



**Mark Nicdao** Top model  
Georgina Wilson didn't hesitate to join the summer issue when she heard the photos would be shot by Mark Nicdao. Filipino celebrities know that he's one of the best to make them look good in print. Nicdao also believes in a fun, relaxed shoot, but everyone still works hard – and delivers.

**Wesley Villarica** With models running around the woods to represent the legends and myths of the Philippines, photographer Wesley Villarica had his work cut out for him. But with a keen eye for the right shot, a great crew and a lot of humor, even the start of the rainy season couldn't spoil the storytelling.



**Michael AW** Multi-awarded international photographer Michael AW is well known for his artistic renditions of documentary photography and for his work on environmental issues, wildlife and eco-travel. AW traveled to the Philippines to work on the book *Heart of the Ocean*, parts of which we reproduce in this issue. Used to stunning underwater life in the many places he has visited, AW was impressed by the variety he found here.

**Yvette Tan** Manila-based horror writer Yvette Tan has published the short-story book *Waking the Dead* and contributed to major newspapers and magazines in the Philippines such as *Uno* and *Preview*. By day, when not haunting her readers' imaginations, she is a freelance writer featuring personalities, finance, fashion, beauty and food. She likes traveling and lip gloss.



**Joel H. Garcia** Joel H. Garcia believes in shooting from the heart – photos, that is. Having been published in many of the country's top magazines, Garcia has a talent to capture fleeting moments: but in this issue it's his capacity to portray stillness that has captivated us. He traveled through the Cordillera, Canon in hand, producing photos that are a testament to the beauty of this mountain region in the Philippines.

# HIGHLIGHTS

## PLAYGROUND

### WHAT TO WEAR AT THE **POKER TABLE**

Poker keeps on conquering hearts – and minds – all over the globe and its popularity in Asia is growing. The Chairman's Cup at PAGCOR paid the biggest prize in Philippine poker history in March and generated a US\$ 1 million prize pool. But there is more to this game than nerves of steel, a blank face and a good balance between skill and luck. Here's a look at how what you wear at the poker table may help you cash in those chips. ILLUSTRATIONS: A.J. OMANDAC



**PSYCHEDELIC:** A psychedelic shirt with as many shapes as you can find will go a long way towards hypnotizing the other players. You may want to include some orders given in a quiet voice such as, "On the count of three, fold if you have a full house."



**BEAUTY & THE CHIPS:** Women are getting more interested in poker. A combination of beauty, tank tops and brains at the table is bound to distract someone.



**SHAMAN:** Wearing tribal amulets, voodoo trinkets, religious medals and having the general appearance that you have friends in an otherworldly dimension might give you an edge over superstitious players. But then again, it might just set off the metal detectors at the entrance.



**NEW SHERIFF:** A cowboy look will remind other players of the saloon era and give you that Clint Eastwood mystique of someone who can't be beaten. Just forbear from bringing a gun, doing too many whiskey shots or accusing others of cheating and getting into a duel.



**THE DARK SIDE:** Covering your eyes and upper face while listening to mind-numbing music is a great idea to make it hard for other players to read your expression. Taken to an extreme this look may end up making you resemble the evil emperor in *Star Wars*.



**HISTORICAL:** If all else fails just get really creative. Why not draw your inspiration at random, from history, for example? At least you might have people so worried that you're not wearing boxer shorts underneath that Roman skirt that you arrive, see and conquer.

TEST YOUR **GAMING** KNOWLEDGE

CASINOS ARE FUN AND MANY GAMES ARE GROWING IN POPULARITY IN HOMES AND ONLINE. WE COMBINE A LITTLE CHALLENGE WITH A LITTLE FUN IN A QUIZ THAT'S BOUND TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE.

**1** A one-armed bandit is:

- ☞ a. A move in poker where you bet blindly
- ☞ b. A slot machine
- ☞ c. A croupier who deals with only one hand
- ☞ d. The jack in a deck of cards

**2** The game that James Bond favored in the Ian Fleming novels was:

- ☞ a. Roulette
- ☞ b. Poker
- ☞ c. Baccarat
- ☞ d. Blackjack

**3** What is "chemin de fer"?

- ☞ a. The numbers on a roulette wheel
- ☞ b. French for railroad
- ☞ c. A variant of the game baccarat
- ☞ d. Both b and c

**4** In which of these countries are casinos illegal?

- ☞ a. Brazil
- ☞ b. Montenegro
- ☞ c. Monaco
- ☞ d. USA

**5** Whose character was not card counting:

- ☞ a. Paul Newman's in *The Color of Money*
- ☞ b. Kevin Spacey's in *21*
- ☞ c. Dustin Hoffman's in *Rainman*
- ☞ d. Zach Galifianakis's in *The Hangover*

**6** How many numbers are there in a roulette wheel?

- ☞ a. 44
- ☞ b. 36
- ☞ c. 26
- ☞ d. 50

**7** What is the most popular card game in Asia?

- ☞ a. Blackjack
- ☞ b. Poker
- ☞ c. Baccarat
- ☞ d. Bridge

**8** When was gaming legalized in Las Vegas?

- ☞ a. 1905
- ☞ b. 1953
- ☞ c. 1931
- ☞ d. 1969

**9** Which of these expressions does not refer to slot machines?

- ☞ a. Candle
- ☞ b. Carousel
- ☞ c. Levy
- ☞ d. Rollup

**10** The 52-card deck commonly used today is based on a model from:

- ☞ a. Germany
- ☞ b. Spain
- ☞ c. Italy
- ☞ d. France

**11** "Rien ne va plus" or "no more bets" is called by the croupier at what game?

- ☞ a. Blackjack
- ☞ b. Poker
- ☞ c. Roulette
- ☞ d. Baccarat

**12** What does "upping the ante" mean?

- ☞ a. Doubling your winnings
- ☞ b. Counting cards
- ☞ c. Increasing the bet
- ☞ d. Asking for more cards



ANSWERS : 1-B; 2-C; 3-D; 4-A; 5-A; 6-B; 7-C; 8-B; 9-C; 10-D; 11-C; 12-C.



# COOKING FOR REAL



Rob Pengson first fell in love with cooking when he was six years old: “My mom would make cannelloni and I would roll the pasta with her in the kitchen,” he fondly remembers.

In fact, he quit a pre-med course to pursue his love for cooking at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. Part time gigs in several other restaurants along with his days in the kitchen at Mandarin Oriental, also in San Francisco, taught him the rest.

A knack for teaching paved the way for the founding of the The Global Culinary & Hospitality Academy in 2007 with his good friend and fellow chef, Benny Ledesma. “We noticed that culinary education attracted rich kids who didn't take it seriously. We decided to open an affordable culinary school with potentially superior education to the expensive schools. We wanted to teach people who really wanted and needed the work.”

It's been four years since the academy opened and it is gaining international recognition with graduates occupying coveted kitchen space in first class cruise ships and Michelin restaurants in Europe.

Chef Pengson's popularity rose during his time on the show *Chef To Go* which featured him going to people's homes to whip up a feast for a given occasion. Despite the show's positive ratings and growing fan base, Pengson retired two years later: “If you want to be a serious chef, you work in a restaurant,” he says.

Together with his equally-talented wife, Chef Sunshine Puey-Pengson, he started The Goose Station in Fort Bonifacio, Metro Manila. This unique restaurant is becoming a destination for foodies and basically anyone who loves to eat. Adopted from the French concept of *dégustation*, it is a tasting menu, designed for guests to appreciate the entire set menu

IN A BUSTLING KITCHEN FULL OF BUSY STAFF IN HATS AND WHITE COATS, ROB PENGSON'S IS A FACE THAT DOESN'T GO UNNOTICED. WELL KNOWN IN THE PHILIPPINES FROM TV'S POPULAR COOKING SHOW *CHEF TO GO*, HE IS NOW HEAD CHEF OF THE GOOSE STATION, ONE OF THE HOTTEST NEW RESTAURANTS IN TOWN.

TEXT: MIKA SANTOS PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI

versus just one dish. Pengson explains it more passionately, “Here, we choose for you. Here, even the flavors of every dish should complement the next.”

Dishes at The Goose Station are creatively quirky and playful, a balance between modern and traditional. Take for example the Beet Garden Salad with different textures of beet, goat's cheese from Davao, edamame, orange, candied walnuts, greens, gingerbread “soil”, and other intricate ingredients colorfully laid out on a plate. All the different elements complement each other in a way that is pleasantly surprising. Another favorite is the 2007 Eggs Benedict, a deconstructed version of the classic dish made of poached egg topped with Hollandaise foam, bacon tuile, fleur de sel and white truffle oil served in a martini glass. A ‘must try’ is the 24-hr Steak. Contrary to popular belief that steak isn't meant to cook for very long, the Pengsons prepare their steak for 24 hours in a vacuum-sealed pack under low temperature, resulting in a miraculously juicy medium rare steak. It's called “molecular gastronomy”, a modern technique that focuses on the chemistry of food, which they learned from taking a short course in Japan. “The food that we make is inspired by our travels, by the things we like, what we find cool and fun. I wouldn't call it fusion. It's more like our personal rendition of what we think is good food.”

So how does Chef Pengson feel about having stuck to his passion for cooking? “Gone are the days when people say ‘you can't have your cake and eat it too’. I'd say hell, yeah, you can.” □





## VITO SELMA: SIMPLICITY BY DESIGN



NELSON MANDELA, PRINCESS TENGKU PUAN PAHANG OF MALAYSIA, PRINCE SAUD BIN SALMAN AL-SAUD OF SAUDI ARABIA: THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE NAMES ON VITO SELMA'S GROWING CLIENT LIST. AT THE YOUNG AGE OF 26, THE FURNITURE DESIGNER AND MANUFACTURER HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS A MAINSTAY NAME THAT JOINS CEBU'S WORLD FAMOUS FURNITURE INDUSTRY. TEXT: MIKA SANTOS

Cebu is the design capital of the Philippines. This island in the heart of Visayas has been called the “Milan of Asia” and now the “Design Destination of Asia”, gaining international recognition for its innovative furniture industry. After producing prominent names like Kenneth Cobonpue, Debbie Palao, and Clayton Tugonon, Cebu is also the breeding ground for many up-and-coming designers who stand out with their own brand of creativity, material exploration and aesthetic taste. One such name is Vito Selma.

Born into the family behind Stonesets International Inc., one of Cebu's most successful high-end furniture export companies, it came naturally for Selma to take part in the industry. “Growing up, my parents used to bring us to the factory a lot. It was somewhat of a playground for me. I started sketching furniture when I was in high school.”

His first furniture design even back then earned a spot in Cebu X 2004, the island's top furniture show. With a natural flair and inborn passion for design, Selma studied interior architecture at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, majoring in furniture design. He decided to cut his time there short when he realized he was learning more about architecture than furniture. Instead, he flew to South Africa for the internship of a lifetime with George De Haast, a well-known interior decorator in Johannesburg. “He is the one person that has influenced me most when it comes to design,” says Selma. “I learned more in those few months than I did in years of school.”

Selma came home armed with everything he learned abroad and launched himself as a full-time designer at the 2008 Cebu X furniture show, garnering three nominations – Best Booth

Design, Best Furniture Product Design, and Best Material Innovation, which he also won. Today he is the Design Director of Stonesets International Inc., working alongside his sister Selina who runs the marketing side of things. With a handful of other awards under his belt, including the highly coveted 2010 Mugna Award for Material Innovation, his furniture can now be found in homes all over the world, not to mention in a few royal palaces, too.

When asked about design, Selma has a rule: Simplicity is itself the most complex design. It is simplicity that drives his creativity as he draws inspiration from the greatest designer of all, Mother Nature. “My style really is a reflection of everything around me. I take what I can from nature and I play with it. There is so much material and inspiration around us: it's what you make of it, really. My style is a play of lines, a test of the limitations of wood and other materials. It is also an evolution. I think everything in this world starts out as a simple line and evolves into complex lines such as curves.” It's no surprise that Selma's favorite material is wood – oak, pine or local mahogany – and he deliberately stays true to its natural color and raw texture, seeing wood as his “partner” rather than as a mere instrument.

Selma is currently off to pursue a Masters Degree in industrial design in Scuola Politecnica in Milan, Italy while exploring a talent for photography. Only time, fate and a growing global desire for exquisitely designed furniture can tell where he goes from there. □

Vito Selma's Furniture: [www.vitoselma.com](http://www.vitoselma.com)

Vito Selma's Photography: <http://vitoselma.viewbook.com>

# NATURAL IRON

STEROIDS COUPLED WITH A LOT OF GYM TIME CAN BULK NEARLY ANYONE UP, BUT THERE'S A REAL DANGER TO THEM. HOW CAN YOU GET THE BODY OF A SUPERHERO THE NATURAL WAY? JERICK TERNIDA HAS A RECIPE, BUT THE FIRST STEP IS AN IRON RESOLUTION AND LOTS OF DISCIPLINE.

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI



To be born at all is already a biological victory in our evolutionary race, but to shape our bodies and minds to our wishes may well be our ultimate challenge.

"It's all about balance," says Jerick Ternida, the first and only Filipino to win an overall title in the World Bodybuilding Competition at the 2008 Musclemenia Universe, "proper sleep, a good diet, a well-designed training routine and most of all discipline."

For all of us who are struggling to keep up with a busy work, family and social life, the word discipline can sound harsh. Yet there is no way around it, it's the number one ingredient if you want to be truly fit.

Looking at Ternida's body today as he is nearly at the end of his professional bodybuilding career, few would imagine that he was once a skinny boy with chronic asthma. He also limped with his left leg due to complications from a medical treatment, something that made him develop an inferiority complex. "When I was at school I was ashamed to even cross

paths with my classmates," says Ternida. "Bodybuilding helped me overcome these complexes."

Ternida believes this period of his life marked his personality and the goals he set for himself. "Every night my mother used to massage my thigh while working on the articulation of my leg. From that time I learned about discipline and constancy and this lesson has never left me."

Ternida's path is not for the faint at heart. His body is the result of more than 20 years of work: He has as many as seven meals a day and he divides his workout routine between cardiovascular exercise in the morning and bodybuilding in the afternoon, every day, seven days a week, even when he is not in a competition period.

It was only through this methodical and at times scientific approach that Ternida could stand a chance to succeed in natural body building. He competes in a league where steroids and other illegal substances are forbidden and systematically tested during competitions. "Clearly it would be much easier >>





to just take steroids in order to build muscle, but the side effects and the risks to our system are very serious. I would not advise it, although steroids have been around for more than 100 years," says Ternida.

This means that every one of the many developed muscles in his body is the fruit of hard work, physical as well as mental. In fact he puts emphasis on the mental aspect: "To have a healthy mind is the basis for anybody's success, including mine. But to have a healthy mind you need also a healthy body, so at the end of the day the two go hand in hand." *Mens sana in corpore sano* as the ancient Romans used to say.

After many years as a professional bodybuilder which brought him a coveted title in the 2008 National Physique Committee (NPC) in Los Angeles, adding to his other accolades, Ternida is ready to move forward in a different direction within the bodybuilding world. "After all I have learned, I feel ready to share my knowledge with other people," he says. Ternida wouldn't mind a future in politics either, as he sees the benefits that sports can bring to people and society as a whole. "A healthy nation is a wealthy nation," he says, perhaps paraphrasing Arnold Schwarzenegger, his idol and role model. "I was lucky to be helped in my career by important institutions like PAGCOR which strongly supports sports in the Philippines, but I think this country can do more to support our athletes," he says.

Intimidating as Ternida's fitness routine may sound on paper, it is actually not impossible to follow, even for moderate athletes who want to bulk up naturally. Here is what it takes:  
 7:30 AM: Drink a glass of apple or aloe vera juice, as they are antioxidants, as soon as you wake up. "First thing in the morning your body needs glycogen (starch), as it comes out of seven or more hours of sleep," Ternida explains. That means forgetting about coffee and donuts.

8:30 AM: Hit a gym preferably located outside the center

of the city, where you can breathe real oxygen, "the best fuel to replenish our brain cells," as Ternida puts it. Use the step machine, or just go for a brisk walk around the gym. "Forty-five minutes is all you need," explains Ternida, "as long as you keep your heart beat at 60 to 70 percent of its regular rhythm in order to burn fat." Surprisingly enough it means you don't have to run as if from the plague to lose your love handles, but just keep up a continuous and gentle aerobic exercise.

9:15 AM: Lie down on the mat for some stretching. "A flexible body is what keeps us young," says Ternida, "and 15 minutes is all you need."

10:00 AM: The first meal of the day: Don't think of eggs and bacon though, go for liquid intake in the form of a protein shake. Ternida calls this moment "the window of opportunity," as you have 30 minutes maximum after any workout to eat your first meal if you want to prevent a catabolic state – a process which breaks down body tissue and results in loss of muscle tone.

10:30 AM: Time for the first solid meal which should be a balanced combination of proteins, carbohydrates and vitamins. Try 200 gr of chicken or fish, a handful of brown rice and some vegetables. No salt, no frying. Ternida adds a couple of egg whites to the mix. He stresses one important point: avoid white rice as it has been polished and deprived of vital nutrients. In addition, your system takes longer to signal a full stomach when eating white rice, which leads to overeating and bulging bellies.

1:30 PM: Second solid meal of the day: same combination as above. This time the brown rice may be exchanged for sweet potatoes which are a low glycemic food that translate into sustained energy for workout.

3:30 PM: Stretching.

4:00 PM: Work out: Ternida trains his body parts separately. Day 1: chest and triceps; Day 2: back and biceps; Day 3: legs and shoulders. Take your pick.

5:30 PM: Liquid meal. Again, be aware of the window of opportunity.

6:30 PM: Solid food with an extra dose of brown rice

9:30 PM: Solid food with no carbohydrates: no rice, no potatoes. Only protein and vegetables.

11:00 PM: Time to sleep. Nights are as important as days for a real athlete, you should rest for at least seven hours but not more than eight.

As a last thought, even if your goal is not to look like Iron Man, remember that discipline is the basis of all success and a source of true happiness. □













# WHO IS THE NEW FILIPINO

TEXT: YVETTE TAN  
ILLUSTRATIONS: YVONNE QUISUMBING

IT'S A GREAT TIME TO BE YOUNG AND FILIPINO. NEVER IN THE WHOLE OF PHILIPPINE HISTORY HAVE YOUNG PEOPLE HAD MORE ACCESS TO EDUCATION, MORE CAREER PATH OPTIONS, AND MORE SAY AS TO HOW THE COUNTRY IS RUN. AND THEY ARE MAKING THE MOST OF IT.



Youth in the Philippines is playing an important part in nation building. You only have to look at the recent elections to see how much: thousands of young people 18 (the legal voting age) to their mid-30s made a stand, not just by way of casting ballots, but also by volunteering during the first ever automated elections in the country and by being outspoken about their choices during the campaign period via wristbands, blog posts and color-coded plastic cups. Rock Ed Radio, a media component of Rock Ed Philippines, a non-profit, non-government organization dedicated to bringing national awareness to the country's youth via avenues like music and film had five out of the eight presidential candidates on their radio show, followed by online coverage on election day itself.

Before that, in September last year, most of Metro Manila, with a majority of the efforts headed by youth groups, came together to help fellow citizens displaced by Typhoon Ketsana, locally known as Ondoy. Different donation centers were set up around the metropolis, one of the notable ones being at Enderun College, a culinary and business school, where students churned out packed lunches that were distributed to typhoon victims. The call for manpower and ingredients were done via Facebook and Twitter since cellphone signals were hard to come by because of the storm. Rock Ed Radio was likewise instrumental, fielding

calls for help sent via text, Facebook and Twitter over the airwaves so listeners knew which areas needed help and if their families were safe.

In a culture that raises children with the 'don't speak unless spoke to' adage, most people forget that it is actually the younger generation that has spearheaded movements that have been, for lack of a better word, historical. National hero Andres Bonifacio was only 29 when he founded the Katipunan, the revolutionary group that fought for the country's freedom from Spanish colonizers. Former President Manuel Quezon was only 28 when he became the first governor of Tayabas, a province that now bears his name. Young people have always been instrumental in the push for societal change – in the 70s, when the country was under dictatorship, in 1986 during the EDSA Revolution, the 'bloodless revolution' that gave the country its democracy, and in EDSA II, which ousted a corrupt president.

With a wide array of technology and economical airfare at its disposal, the projects of today's youth, taken together, are spelling change for the country.

One of the biggest ways this is manifested is in the rise of a class of people who are being recognized for – and making a comfortable living with – their creativity. Even just a couple of decades ago, one would be hard-pressed to find a parent willing to allow their child to become a writer, an artist, a filmmaker, a photographer or a musician because the belief was that one needed a corporate, or at least a bricks-and-mortar job to be able to support oneself.



Now, being a makeup artist may be considered a high profile job, and graphic artists have become celebrities in their own right.

An example of the latter is Team Manila, a graphic design studio mainly known for their t-shirts, though they also carry other lifestyle products, all of them espousing a laid back kind of patriotism, one that juxtaposes history with modern living through images such as national hero Jose Rizal wearing shades or a coin purse with a fish design and the words 'pamalengke' (market funds), a direct reference to the Filipino housewife's practice of placing petty cash in a purse when going to the wet market.

What they have is a kind of creativity that defies the conventional. It is present in other creative disciplines as well, some of whom have even been acknowledged in the international arena. Miguel Syjuco has the distinction of being the first Filipino to win the 2008 Man Asia Literary Prize for his novel *Ilustrado*, beating literary heavyweights from around the region (he was 32 when he won). In 2009, Pepe Diokno's film *Engkwentro* won the Horizon's Prize and Lion of the Future Award for Debut Film at the Venice Film Festival, making him the festival's youngest winner. Just this year, fashion designer and milliner Mich Dulce won the International Young Fashion Entrepreneur award in London.

The music scene has likewise flourished, with Filipino bands currently more popular than foreign ones, a phenomenon that was, until now, unheard of. And that's just in the country. Overseas, people are beginning to take notice

of Filipino talent, and we're not just talking about Charice Pempengco. Ciudad, an independent band, was invited to play at the 2009 CMJ Music Marathon and Film Festival, an annual festival held in New York City that aims to bring together industry festivals and independent artists. Many other local bands, some mainstream and some independent, have also played in festivals overseas.

The progress of youth isn't just relegated to politics and the humanities. Young people make up the bulk of the call center industry, one of the country's biggest earners. In this area, the country's past as an American colony has served it well, since Filipinos tend to speak better English than their Asian neighbors. A big part of the country's population working overseas are young Filipinos, all of them boosting the economy through dollar remittances. Back in the Motherland, more and more young people are becoming entrepreneurs, opening restaurants, producing their own line of clothes and accessories, and continuing family businesses. Today, age truly is just a number, and almost anything is possible with the right mindset.

Because of factors like the internet, cellular phones and access to travel opportunities, Filipinos are learning about the world at a younger age. This has opened a lot of options with regards to how to direct their lives, and as a result, helped shape the country. True, nothing is perfect and there are things that could be better still, but that seems to be exactly what this crop of youngsters is working towards.

Andres Bonifacio would be proud. □



# LAND *of* LEGEND

A RICH TRADITION OF LEGENDS AND MYTHS EXISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES. INFLUENCED BY PRE-COLONIAL NATIVE CULTURE AS WELL AS BY A SPANISH PAST, SOME STORIES EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN OF MAN AND NATURE, WHILE OTHERS SERVE TO TEACH OR TERRIFY.

PHOTOS: WESLEY VILLARICA  
PRODUCTION AND ART DESIGN: RAFFY TESORO


MARIANG MAKILING IS THE GODDESS OF THE MOUNTAIN. ASSOCIATED WITH THE RADIANT WHITE MIST THAT OFTEN COVERS THE PEAKS, SHE IS ALSO THE PROTECTOR OF NATURE AND ANIMALS.

Spiked headdress and armor suit: *Kermit Tesoro*; Earrings: *George Palmiano*; Dress: *Tina Daniac*; Ring: *Firma*.









THE CAUSE OF EARTHQUAKES IS  
SAID TO BE BERNARDO CARPIO.  
CHAINED TO ROCKS, HE  
MAKES THE LAND SHAKE AS HE  
STRUGGLES TO GET FREE.

Mesh hoodie, chain belts and  
suspenders: *Estien Quijano*;  
Head armor: *George Palmiano*;  
Utility boots: *Bobon by Ulysses King*.





BORN WHEN A CROW PECKED AT A  
BAMBOO SHOOT UNTIL IT SPLIT INTO TWO  
SECTIONS, MALAKAS AND MAGANDA ARE  
THE FILIPINO ADAM AND EVE.









THE ORIGIN OF PALAKPAKIN LAKE IS A BEAUTIFUL RED-HAIRED WOMAN WHO COULD BE SEEN WASHING HER HAIR IN A RIVER, WITH A FISH FOR COMPANY. WHEN APPROACHED BY A STRANGER ENAMORED OF HER, SHE MADE THE EARTH QUAKE AND THE RIVER SWELL INTO A LAKE.

Deep blue satin strapless gown: *Jian Lasala*;  
Earrings: *George Palmiano*



JUAN TAMAD ILLUSTRATES THE DANGERS OF LAZINESS.  
HE LIES UNDER A TREE WAITING FOR THE FRUIT TO FALL  
INTO HIS MOUTH AND ENDS UP DYING OF HUNGER.

Shirt: *Bobon* by *Ulysses King*; Hat, cropped pants, trunks  
and bolero: *Estien Quijano*; Silver necklace: *Firma*.



THE MOST FEARED CREATURE IN FILIPINO LEGEND,  
THE ASWANG IS A COMBINATION OF VAMPIRE AND  
WITCH. HER UPPER BODY SEPARATES FROM THE LOWER  
WHILE SHE GOES IN SEARCH OF HUMAN PREY.

Wings and tribal costume: *Raffy Tesoro*;  
Earrings: *George Palmiano*.











THE IBONG ADARNA KNOWS SEVEN SONGS THAT ARE BELIEVED  
TO LULL ANYONE TO SLEEP. AFTER EACH SONG, ITS BEAUTIFUL  
PLUMAGE BECOMES MORE COLORFUL AND INTENSE.

Gray beaded gown: *Jan Garcia*; Feather headdress: *Raffy Tesoro*

**Models:** Jasmine Maierhofer and Kim Ross of Mercator, Alvin Aguilar of Raven Models

**Make-up:** Noel Flores and Charlie Manapat

**Hair:** Dimple Callada

**Styling:** Mike de Guzman and George Palmiano of MGP

**Print Producer:** Diane Zoleta of Star Models

**Location:** Thanks to Patis Tesoro and Ado Escudero of Villa Escudero





**Enchanted**

**Activities**





When you arrive at PAGCOR Angeles in Pampanga you might be surprised at the figures guarding its entrance: warriors with the bodies of men and the heads of bulls and dogs, representing King Sinukwan's army of mythological figures living in Mt. Arayat.

According to a local legend, King Sinukwan married Mariang Makiling after having defeated her tribe, the Taga-ilugs. The couple had three daughters, Malagu (beautiful), Mahinhin (modest), and Matimtiman (charming), all named after traits they inherited from their mother. Much to the king and queen's displeasure, the three daughters fell in love with mortal men. After some time, amazed by their determination and loyalty, the king finally allowed his daughters to marry the mortals.

"Central Luzon is a melting pot of intriguing legends, a trait shared by Angeles as one of its most vibrant cities," explains Michael J. Bailey, PAGCOR Angeles' Branch Manager. "It's also the center of an economic and transport corridor that crosses the central and northern part of this island."

In fact, location seems to be a strong feature of PAGCOR Angeles. Situated in the heart of the city, the establishment offers nearly 50,000 square feet of gaming and entertainment areas distributed among three levels. Service is also highly personalized, from the warmth of the welcome to the lavish food and entertainment venues.

"Following the directions of our board, we are promoting PAGCOR Angeles as an overall entertainment experience, not just gaming, and one that could attract all members of the family," explains Bailey.

Between Angeles and Clark, a former American airbase, there are five existing casinos at the moment, but Bailey does not see this competition as a threat. "I rather think of these as complementing businesses, same as the integrated resorts of Marina Bay Sands and Resort World Sentosa which have both recently opened in Singapore," he says. "I also see this proliferation of casinos as a sign of confidence in the area."

Bailey has a 25-year-long career at PAGCOR and he has worked in the largest and highest-earning casinos of the corporation before. "I strongly believe that PAGCOR Angeles has the potential to be among the top-ranking establishments in the industry," he says. "We gather clients not only from Angeles but also from the nearby city of Saint Fernando and the two towns are gradually melting into one single urban center which will provide an even larger base of loyal customers."

Despite their love for Pampanga and its people, the legend has it that King Sinukwan and Queen Makiling abandoned Mt. Arayat one day in favor of a rainbow where they lived with enchanted beings and gave birth to their last daughter Tala.

Whatever the myth says, PAGCOR Angeles is here to stay. ☐





## WHAT SUITS

# georgina

WHO WOULD SAY, LOOKING AT GEORGINA WILSON EXPERTLY EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF DIFFERENT SUITS OF CARDS, THAT HER FIRST LOVE WAS MATH? THOUGH SHE LONGS TO DO HER FRIENDS' TAXES, THE MODELING WORLD CAN'T QUITE GET ENOUGH OF HER YET.

TEXT: YVETTE TAN PHOTOS: MARK NICDAO







*QUEEN ♥ HEARTS*

THE DREAMY AND MYSTERIOUS QUEEN  
OF HEARTS INSPIRES ROMANCE AND  
PASSIONATE LOVE.



## QUEEN OF SPADES

SPADES ARE THE HIGHEST RANKING CARDS. THIS QUEEN IS THE ESSENCE OF NOBILITY, PROUD AND COMMANDING.





QUEEN ♣ CLUBS

CLUBS INDICATE AN EARTHY NATURE.  
THE QUEEN OF CLUBS IS FREE AND STRONG.



*QUEEN OF DIAMONDS*

THE DAZZLING QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
EXHIBITS POWER IN THE FORM OF WEALTH.





“**A**ctually, I never wanted to model.”

This statement comes as a surprise, because the person saying it, one Georgina Wilson, is currently the hottest face in Manila.

Georgina isn't new to the fashion industry. In fact, she's been around for quite a while now, having been in many high-profile ad campaigns and posing for different magazines. The difference is that she has recently returned to Manila after graduating with an accounting and economics degree from the University of Sydney, having turned down a prestigious accounting job in London to keep modeling. At least for now.

Because her first love, she says, lies with numbers. “Math's really my thing. That's what I'm really used to. I loved it so much I would teach all my friends remedial classes after and I'd be so happy doing it.”

In fact, she loved math so much that not only was she in the advanced program in grade school and high school, when she tried out for a local university, her score was in the top 5<sup>th</sup> percentile, landing her in a course so hard to get into there were only three other people in it. Her love for the academic, she says, comes from her father, who works in finance. “The course I chose and the career path I intend on going into is very much shaped by my dad, who is into finance, and that is my passion now.”

Her penchant for the limelight (something that she says she had to get used to), on the other hand, comes from her mother's side of the family – a side that is extremely close-knit. One of her aunts is Miss Universe 1969, Gloria Diaz, whose daughter Isabelle is one of Georgina's closest friends. “My life is very shaped by my family. If you want to be friends with Belle and me, you have to be friends with the whole family.”

On the day of the interview, she is wearing a black blouse with gold detail on the sleeves. Her hair is tied back, and she isn't wearing any makeup. She looks like a normal girl – albeit an incredibly beautiful one – spending the afternoon at the mall. She has her laptop open and her Blackberry within grabbing distance. She talks about her childhood in England, before her family moved to the Philippines. “It was the nicest childhood because I really grew up on a farm. My siblings and I have the best memories of having horses. We even brought up chickens. We used to go on walks and pick strawberries.”

When she was about 10, Georgina's mom asked her husband if they could raise their children in the Philippines, and he agreed. It is something that Georgina is grateful for. “I feel

that growing up in the Philippines gave me an awareness of what the real world is. There are values that are instilled in you here that you don't get abroad.”

In a way, Georgina's upbringing was traditional: though she is very independent, she acknowledges that a lot of who she is now is shaped by choices that her parents have made for her. This includes her foray into modeling after high school, and the decision to finish the rest of her university education in Australia, both of which worked out well for her. “I had begun to enjoy modeling and was doing really big projects,” she says, “I didn't want to leave but it was time. My dad really wanted me to go abroad and now I thank him for it. I matured in a way that I never would have done here. Before I lived abroad, I didn't even know how to do my laundry.”

Living overseas definitely gave her a different way of viewing the Philippines. “What's great is that when you live abroad and you miss the Philippines, the small things don't matter anymore. Like the traffic? I love it! When I was abroad, this was what I missed. There was a time that I got so homesick that I had to learn how to cook *sinigang*. It gives you a new perspective and you really appreciate things.”

It is fun to imagine that *sinigang* may have played a part in her decision to stay in Manila. The reality, however, is that her decision was shaped by the one important factor present in every successful career: she enjoyed the work. “I came back here last November just to shoot a campaign. I was all ready to move on. Then all of a sudden, I'm being offered work again and I fell right back into it,” she says. “I had missed it. When I was living abroad, I was here for a week or two and was always rushing, so this time I thought, ‘Maybe I can dedicate a few months of my life to this.’ And now it's become a year.”

Show business is the natural progression of celebrities who want to make it really big in the Philippines. For Georgina, the decision isn't a matter of opportunity but of ability, something she is not sure she has just yet. “I honestly love the showbiz industry. But I don't know if I could do that. All my friends are such good actresses and I watch what they do and I say, ‘seriously guys, let me work on that skill first. Let me do your taxes, your accounting.’ That's what I'm good at, really. Don't make me jump into a show.”

Georgina is completely happy where she is right now. Her schedule is packed with meetings, magazine and commercial shoots and Channel V tapings, with no end in sight. Not bad for a girl who didn't want to model. □

PRODUCTION AND ART DESIGN: RAFFY TESORO  
STYLING: BEA CONSTANTINO  
MAKE UP: GELA LAUREL  
HAIR: OGIE RAYEL OF KIEHL'S  
BLACK LEATHER CORSET AND SPIKED HELMET BY PATRICK GALANG.  
GEORGINA IS REPRESENTED BY W TALENT MANAGEMENT - WWW.WTALENTMANAGEMENT.COM





# THE ART OF THE MATTER

SILVANA ANCELLOTTI-DIAZ LEARNED TO APPRECIATE PHILIPPINE ART BY MINGLING WITH THE COUNTRY'S GREATEST ARTISTS IN PERSON. WITH HUSBAND RAMON, SHE NOW RUNS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL GALLERIES IN MANILA, AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE SERVES AS A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR ANY COLLECTOR AND ART LOVER.

TEXT AND PORTRAITS: MARCO VENDITTI  
PHOTOS OF PAINTINGS: COURTESY OF GALLERIA DUEMILA



Donatello, Mantegna and Rubens produced some of the best works of the Renaissance in Mantua, under the auspices of the Gonzaga family. It was in this city steeped in art where Silvana Ancellotti-Diaz was born. “Collecting art is something that I learned from my mother,” she says. “I still remember the long discussions when she wanted to buy futurist paintings back in Italy. My father was against it as he didn’t see the rationale behind it. Nowadays, a painting by De Pisis or Morandi, who at that time were just beginning to be appreciated, would be worth a fortune.”

Ancellotti-Diaz left Italy at an early age “to discover the wider world.” After completing her studies in England and France, she began working for Alitalia and ended up landing in Manila for the first time in 1970. A few years later, she was back in the Philippines to stay. >>





ABOVE  
**"Aquino Descending the Staircase"**

Onib Olmedo - 1984  
 monotype/monoprint on paper, 64.8 x 50.2 cm. / 25.53 x 19.79 in.

RIGHT  
**"Shout"**

Kiukok Ang - 1979  
 oil on canvas, 114.3 x 88.9 cm. / 45.03 x 35.03 in.









ABOVE  
**"Maid in Negros Goes Global"**  
 Alvarado Nunelucio - 1994  
 oil on canvas, 152.00 x 91.00 cm. / 59.89 x 35.85 in.



ABOVE  
**"Escorial"**  
 Fernando Zobel - 1961  
 oil on canvas, 96.5 x 129.5 cm. / 38.02 x 51.02 in.



ABOVE  
**"Black Performance 2"**  
 Arturo Luz - 1991  
 acrylic with collage on paper, 122 x 237 cm. / 48.07 x 93.38 in.





TOP  
**"Circa 1971 (Crucifixion)"**  
 Cesar Legaspi - 1971  
 oil on masonite, 120 x 168.91 cm. / 47.28 x 66.55 in.

BOTTOM  
**"Lingering"**  
 Ramon Diaz - 2004  
 oil on canvas, 271.5 x 130 cm. / 106.97 x 51.22 in.



In Manila, Ancellotti-Diaz not only rediscovered her childhood love for the arts, but also found a companion for life in artist Ramon Diaz. Together they run Galleria Duemila, one of the city's oldest and most successful galleries, where collectors, artists and buyers rub elbows everyday. Galleria Duemila is also the Diaz's residence, Ramon's studio and a good starting point to discover a vibrant contemporary arts scene.

Since 1975 when Galleria Duemila opened its doors to the public, Ancellotti-Diaz has hosted hundreds of exhibitions of Filipino artists, built an enviable collection of modern and contemporary painters and established herself as one of the country's patrons of the arts.

"There are really creative people in the Philippines and I was

a vast collection of Filipino paintings, especially of the modernist, neorealist, expressionist, and abstract schools. She has also amassed a small but powerful collection of sculptures by artists like Duddley Diaz, Impy Pilapil and Roberto M. A. Robles. Being a collector herself helps Ancellotti-Diaz fully understand the Philippines' artistic production and stay in tune with the country's avant-garde movements. "I often visit the city's art galleries at around lunch time, when there is no one around so that I can truly appreciate the collections without all the buzz of the social crowd," she says. "When I like something, I buy it right way if I can afford it. I don't even attempt to contact the artists for a special deal."

According to Ancellotti-Diaz though, the art market is still undervalued in the Philippines: "Dealers often come all the

“THE HISTORY OF ANY COUNTRY  
IN THE WORLD IS MADE BY THE ARTISTS  
WHO HAVE STRUGGLED TO EXPRESS THEIR IDEAS  
AND VALUES, AND *NOT ONLY* BY NATIONAL HEROES.”

lucky to personally meet some of its best artists upon arriving in this country," she says. Back in the 70s, Ancellotti-Diaz fell in with the Saturday Group, an avant-garde circle of artists that would meet every Saturday at 3 o'clock to discuss the latest artistic trends, display their works or merely exchange ideas about life and current affairs. Underground movements like the Saturday Group were in fact depositories of knowledge during the years of Ferdinand Marcos' regime. Ancellotti-Diaz met Hernando R. Ocampo, Onib Olmedo, Cesar Legaspi, Tiny Nuyda, Leo Benesa and Jose Joya among others: Their names were virtually unknown back then, but they would later turn into some of the country's most appreciated artists.

"My husband Ramon was always supportive of my choices and lifestyle, but he would often ask me why I was so fascinated by these people. My answer back then is the same as today: I like to be around artists and I am fascinated by their creativity," she says.

The lesson that Ancellotti-Diaz learned from this highly creative generation stayed with her and even today she looks for artists who are trying to break boundaries with their work. "Each artist needs recognition even if he deals with subjects that are not easily accepted by the market," she says.

With this simple but strong concept in mind, Ancellotti-Diaz has been collecting art all her life and she boasts

way from Hong Kong and Singapore to tap into the local pool of artists who are definitely more affordable by international standards," she says. Normally it is the artist himself who sets the prices, but Ancellotti-Diaz often suggests otherwise if she feels that they are overpricing their work in relation to the local market. "The Philippines is somehow conservative and buyers often don't want to make an effort to understand a work of art. They want to get the message right away, that's why they prefer figurative work," she says. "In my opinion though, the most interesting young conceptual artists nowadays use computer and video installations to convey their meaning."

Ancellotti-Diaz does not deal in art only for commercial reasons. "The history of any country in the world is made by the artists who have struggled to express their ideas and values, and not only by national heroes," she says. Each and every artist who has ever gone through her gallery has been attentively catalogued by her staff in files that include photographs of their work, bio data as well as their signature in case questions may arise about authenticity.

The question of how to define her work inevitably arises in conversation. "You can call me an art dealer, a collector or a patron of the arts, as I often help struggling artists when I see talent in them, but at the end of the day I am a humanist at heart," she says. "My ultimate dream would be to have a museum to exhibit all of my favorite works of art." □

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Galleria Duemila is located at 210 Loring St., Pasay City in Metro Manila and is currently showing an exhibition by sculptors Agnes Arellano and Duddley Diaz. Telephone (+63 2) 831 9990 Telefax (+63 2) 833 9815 Email: duemila@mydestiny.net Website: [www.galleriaduemila.com](http://www.galleriaduemila.com)



# MANILA INK

A RESURGENCE OF PINOY COMICS THAT BEGAN IN THE MID-90S HAS PROPELLED THE SCENE FROM ITS GRASSROOTS TO THE INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT. RIDING ON THIS MOMENTUM, A NEW GENERATION OF ARTISTS AND GRAPHIC NOVELISTS HAS EMERGED, COMMITTING THEIR IDEALS TO PAPER WITH A MYTHOLOGY AND A JUSTICE LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN.

TEXT: CHAD RIALP    PORTRAITS: MARCO VENDITTI





# MARK TORRES

Mark Torres is a comic book super freak. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the comic book universe is matched only by his creativity. He doesn't sleep, has a poor diet, and his life revolves around a deadline. But his devotion to his art is nothing short of heroic.

Quite possibly one of the most prolific artists in the Philippine comic scene today, Torres' eclecticism spans the drama of Mike Mignola (creator of *Hellboy*) to the more audacious Ashley Wood (*Spawn*, *30 Days of Night*). Sprinkle a little Tarantino into the mix and you have a body of work that is distinctly his own.

For Torres, comics and cartoons inspired a career in illustration, having been weaned on *Batman*, Saturday morning cartoons, and a Filipino classic, *Funny Komiks*. His artistic upbringing took place during the local comic scene's renaissance in the 90s, which paralleled the defection of top Marvel artists in the US to Image Comics. "They served as a catalyst for the entire global industry to mature and start breaking barriers, more in terms of art and production," recounts Torres. "Pinoy Komiks started dealing with more modern, often original, characters and themes while still showing characteristics that reflected the Filipinos, and setting the stories mostly in the country."

And without question, Filipino themes are prevalent in Torres' work. "I believe it's inherent in all of us to try and sneak in as many local references as we possibly can," he says. "Especially for international projects. Whilce Portacio kicked it off by putting a Philippine flag on Colossus's jacket in one issue of *Uncanny X-men*, Leinil Yu had a Chowking store in *Superman: Birthright*. Any chance I get to promote the country, I take it."

A professional graphic designer and illustrator with close to a decade of professional experience, Torres gained recognition thanks to the online artists' networking site, DeviantArt. Known for his graphic creation, *Derring Do*, he recently completed an 8-page back-up tale written by comics legend Hilary Barta for Dark Horse's highly praised and soon-to-be-major-motion-picture, *Fear Agent*, as well as contributing to Image Comics' *Liquid City vol.2*, due for release in September.

For years, Filipino talents like Carlo Pagulayan (*Hulk*), Stephen Segovia (*Wolverine*), and Harvey Tolibao (*X-men*) have infiltrated the ranks of Marvel Comics, DC Comics, and Image Comics. Torres is part of a new wave of emerging artists, standing alongside Arnold Arre (*Andong Agimat*), Budjette Tan (*Trese*), Gerry Alanguilan (*Wasted*, *Elmer*) and Carlo Vergara (*ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*), each looking to earn his own piece of the international pie.

According to Torres, "Filipinos are blessed with awesome creativity to begin with. That's why we're in such high demand from big publishers as well as TV, movie, and animation companies. We're extremely competent and very resourceful. It's no wonder a lot of the flagship titles from Marvel and DC are being drawn by Pinoys."

But with all this talent, the competition is stiff. "Breaking in is hard as hell," says Torres, "but staying in is boss-level difficult. Plus you have to compete with an endless crop of artists all over the globe that are better than you most of the time."

Torres' work is evidence enough that he'll be able to hold his own in the global arena with an impressive résumé that is still growing. Drawing from a deep well of influences, his work is fresh and unique, cultivated from fearless experimentation and a voracious appetite for all things different and new.

Check out Mark Torres' work at [mytymark.deviantart.com](http://mytymark.deviantart.com).

Pin-up from ZVR:Adventure #1 by IDW Publishing, released worldwide in February, 2010.







Alexandra Trese summons three santelmo in an attempt to stop Talagbusao, the god of war. Trese was created by Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo. Published by Vsprint. All artwork by Kajo Baldisimo.

# BUDJETTE TAN



When the Executive Creative Director of the ad agency Harrison Communications is not looking, Budjet Tan writes comic books.

"It's hard being a comic book writer here in the Philippines," Tan relates. "You do it because you love it. One can't earn a living writing comics here — at least, not yet. Same goes for comic book artists. If you're really good, then you'll get hired to do comics for Marvel or DC and earn enough to make a living. So, in the meantime, you get yourself a job and write your stories when you have the time."

And hence the role he plays as the Deputy Executive Creative Director in aforementioned company. But when he sheds his corporate alter ego, Tan is the writer of crime/horror graphic novel *Trese* which he co-created with fellow artist Kajo Baldisimo — well known for his work with *Star Wars: Legacy* and Dark Horse's *Defuser*.

"I write the stories that excite me and hope they will excite other readers as well," reveals Tan. "I just want my stories to be able to entertain Pinoys and hopefully be able to make them look at their everyday world with some sense of magic and wonder once again."

*Trese* is a critically acclaimed favorite in the Philippine scene. Its premise revolves around its title character — a female detective who deals with the supernatural — taking the reader deep into the underbelly of paranormal organized crime. Tan weaves his story like a postmodern film *noir*, and Baldisimo's stark artwork adeptly spawns an atmosphere of suspense. As a self-proclaimed fan of *CSI*, *Criminal Minds*, and *House*, Tan's proclivity for investigation and mystery shines through in his writing, revealing just enough to keep you glued to the page.

"I grew up hearing stories about *aswang* in the provinces," Tan shares. "I just thought that it was time to bring all those creatures of Philippine folklore and myth to the city; bring them to an urban setting and give them a more modern feel. It's something that I haven't seen done so much in local comics and thought it would be great to do so."

Tan has been collecting comic books for the past 24 years and has come a long way since the very first work he did in elementary school called *COSMIC MAN!* He made just one copy. His second foray into self-publication came after college graduation when he and some friends released *Comics 101*, inspired by the works of Chris Claremont, Marv Wolfman, Neil Gaiman, and Alan Moore, to name just a few.

"Back in 1993 and 1994, there were only a handful of comic book creators who released, published, or Xeroxed their own creations," he reminisces. "Atlas Komiks and GASI Komiks were still publishing and selling *komiks* on the sidewalk then."

Over a decade later, publishing companies finally took note and opened new avenues for comic book and graphic novel projects. Today, more local works occupy the shelves of bookstores and regular comic book events like Komikon and the Metro Comic Con are indicative of a growing market.

"I'd like to believe that the current comic book publishers will continue producing comic books and graphics novels," states Tan. "I'd like to believe that in the next couple of years, our local bookstores will start devoting entire sections for local graphic novels; that we'll start exporting our works via orders from the web and start generating an international audience."

And as Tan explains, this actually isn't a very tall order. Pinoys have had a presence in the American comic book industry as early as the 70s, with about a dozen or so currently under the Marvel and DC banners. "I think the really talented and really industrious Pinoy artists will always find work abroad and their art will always be appreciated, admired, and loved by an international audience."

The Tan-Baldisimo tandem are currently working on the fourth installment of *Trese*, with the first three books already enjoying widespread distribution in the Philippines. Previews of their work can be seen at [www.tresecomics.com](http://www.tresecomics.com).





# PAOLO FABREGAS

"What else do I do outside of comics?" asks Paolo Fabregas. "For me this a funny question. I feel that I am very much outside of comics and I'm desperately trying to squeeze it in into my life."

For the most part, Fabregas is occupied by what he refers to as "real life" – a day job in advertising, being a proud father of two boys, and occasionally wishing he had the super ability to cram a full eight hours worth of sleep into half an hour.

"Not only would I be well rested," he says, "I'd get so much drawing done. Call me Passout."

However, he will admit his work complements his comic book writing, often applying the same discipline to create his stories. Still considered a rookie in the scene, Fabregas began his foray into graphic novels two years ago, spurred by his former Art Director in advertising and one of the creators of the graphic series *Skyworld*, Ian Sta. Maria.

"I drew Batman taking a snooze on a chair and I guessed it impressed him," he recalls. "He started pushing and encouraging me to draw my own comic book. And it was through him that I got to know Budjette Tan, author of *Trese* and the editor of my graphic novel."

Presently, he's putting the finishing touches on Book One of *The Filipino Heroes League*, a story about a group of Filipino super heroes working for the Philippine government. They're underfunded, unappreciated, and generally unwanted, but they still do what they can.

Fabregas is *FHL*'s writer and artist. "I write the entire comic first before I set out to draw. But to be honest, for me, the writing is the drawing. Writing is a very visual process for me so usually once the script is done, the entire comic is already drawn in my head."

His work evokes Todd McFarlane's *Spider-man* complete with cheeky dialogue and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. There are also notable similarities between *FHL*'s gritty world and that of Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*. *FHL* will be published under Visprint and is scheduled for release in 2011. Previews are posted on [pfab.deviantart.com](http://pfab.deviantart.com).

"At the time that I started conceptualizing *The Filipino Heroes League*," Fabregas narrates, "there were a lot of corruption scandals going on in the country. There was also a pervasive feeling of helplessness and hopelessness as well. I wanted to tackle that point of view and I wanted to show people that there was still a lot of hope for our country – we just have to fight for it. Currently, I'm in a nationalistic state of mind so I've got a lot ideas floating around my head that revolve around those themes."

Despite his optimism, he has very modest expectations for his debut, simply wishing that its appeal goes beyond graphic novel readers.

"Primarily, I hope people read it. After that, I hope people like it. If they get anything else over and above simple entertainment then that's an added plus."

Another thing that Fabregas loses sleep over is a website he helped develop called [glyphwall.com](http://glyphwall.com), where local comic book artists can display and even sell their work online. Distribution is always a problem for the indie-comic creator and he hopes that this website is a step towards overcoming that difficulty. On the other hand, he has nothing but the utmost confidence in seeing his fellow artists thrive outside the archipelago.

"Filipino artists have been making it big in the US comic scene for some time now," he says. "I see nothing standing in our way to taking over the comic industry over there. But I secretly hope that even if they do make it there, they'll still write and draw comics locally and tell stories that are relevant to Filipinos. Who knows, perhaps 20 years from now, we'll have a thriving industry with rival comic publishing outfits and toys and movies and all that cool stuff!" □





# THE SPORT OF KINGS

AN UNKNOWN PERSIAN AUTHOR WROTE THAT "MAN IS A BALL TOSSED INTO THE FIELD OF EXISTENCE, DRIVEN HITHER AND THITHER BY THE CHAUGAN STICK OF DESTINY." AT THE MANILA POLO CLUB, HOWEVER, THE STICK IS FIRMLY YIELDED BY EXPERT PLAYERS IN A GAME WHERE BEAUTY AND PRECISION COMBINE TO FORM A ROYAL SPECTACLE.

Text: ANNA C. SOBREPEÑA  
Photos: MARCO VENDITTI







The sport of kings commences at the Enrique Zobel field for the Past President's Cup and officially opens the season at the Manila Polo Club. It's a low goal match and the riders of both teams in their polo garb play out the chukker, aiming mallets to manipulate the ball towards the goal. Spectators sit in summer chic for the afternoon event, all part of a tradition that goes back a century in Manila.

More than a hundred years ago, pomp and ceremony were in attendance at the games that played out from January to March. It was an era of elegance where women donned long gowns or the traditional Filipina dress and men wore their Sunday best.

American Governor General William Cameron Forbes founded the Manila Polo Club in 1909 for "the pleasure of gentlemen of a certain class to play polo." Forbes arrived in the country as Commissioner for Commerce and Police during the period when the Philippines was governed as a colony by the United States of America. He was a true enthusiast of the sport and when President Taft appointed him Governor General, the Philippines officially embraced polo.

Governor General Forbes envisioned the Club to be "organized principally for the purpose of polo, with a rambling and rustic clubhouse situated in the country within easy reach of a number of men, owners of large estates who have clubbed together for their polo and other sports." Forbes is





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credited as having perpetuated the sport in the Philippines, and consequently the Club.

It opened on November 27, 1909, in Calle Real in Pasay. A fire razed the original clubhouse to the ground and it was rebuilt in 1950 on the site where it now stands, occupying 25 hectares of land. Exclusively for members who were selectively invited, it transitioned to proprietary classification in 1977. Three years later women were allowed to become members. The Manila Polo Club evolved into a family club with different provisions to address the expanded, diversified membership.

Through the years it has become a venue for several sporting events. Facilities now include the archery range, badminton courts, bowling center, fitness center, golf driving range,

softball field, squash courts, swimming pools and tennis courts. Polo and equestrian sports, however, remain the centerpiece. The Club cultivates this hallmark, providing riding lessons, stabling facilities, veterinary services and a one-stop tack store selling horse supplies and riding equipment.

Riders who trained here went on to distinguish themselves in national and international meets. The equestrian season begins in September and culminates at the Annual Horse Show held in April and May. Weekend dressage, gymkhana and show jumping competitions are held either at the Big Arena or in the West Field. The competitive horse training event develops a riding horse's natural athletic ability and willingness to perform to maximize its potential. Dressage, »»







which is occasionally referred to as “horse ballet,” demonstrates the animal’s ability to perform the requested movement under the direction of a skilled rider’s minimal cue.

Audiences hold their breath during show jumping events where participants display boldness, control, accuracy, power and speed, particularly in the jump-off courses. Horse and rider execute precise form and balance to clear the fence and avoid knock-downs.

Polo matches, for which the Club was established, happen at the beginning of every year and gather the top players in the country. Historians are unable to determine the exact origins of the game, though some conjecture it is an offshoot of military training maneuvers from Central Asia. It existed before men could write, as suggested by a long, oral tradition that includes polo stories even before time of Alexander the Great of Macedonia.

Jones Lanza, a Club member and polo player began riding the country variety horses at the age of four. He rode the ponies in Baguio before beginning formal riding lessons at the age of six. By the time he was eight years old, Lanza was competing. It was only much later that he gave in to friends’ entreaties to try for the polo matches.

“Being an equestrian, I was naturally drawn to the sport,” he says. “My polo player friends knew that once I tried it, I

would love it.”

Beginners are hooked by the speed and thrill of the chukker. There are six chukkers or periods in a big match, each lasting seven minutes. The excitement of galloping on a half-ton animal at 25 to 30 mph, while trying to hit a little ball is a starting point. However, it is a serious matter that requires hard work and time.

“The promise of becoming a better player keeps me going,” Lanza says. “I am encouraged to ride, practice, work and play the horses together with the group. I have learned a lot from my friends and fellow players. They have all had a hand in my training.”

He describes the relationship between horse and rider. “The bond is very strong. You have to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the horse.” It is a melding of man and beast which has been described as having two heads, four legs and one heart.

The image is apt as men and horses engage in competition and run through the field in the kingly sport that has spanned thousands of years. Polo is the heartbeat of an institution that has kept the games going for more than ten decades in Manila. From the number of players and spectators at the annual events, the tradition finds a renewed allure with the passing of time. □



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# CONQUERING THE CORDILLERA

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ON THE PHILIPPINE ISLAND OF LUZON, THERE IS AN IRRESISTIBLE PULL TO THE NORTH. LIKE COMPASS NEEDLES THAT ALWAYS POINT THAT WAY, THE FREEWHEELING LIFT THEIR BACKPACKS AND GO NORTH TO THE CORDILLERA. THE WORLD-FAMOUS RICE FIELDS, TORTUOUS ROADS, MAJESTIC WATERFALLS AND THICK FORESTS ARE LIKE A MAGNET TO ADVENTUROUS TRAVELERS.

TEXT: VIC LACTAOEN

PHOTOS: JOEL H. GARCIA (unless otherwise indicated)







**N**orth is where the Cordillera is, a mysterious region still populated by several indigenous tribes and their gods.

The Cordillera is the largest mountainous area in the Philippines with 1.75 million hectares of wild and often uncharted land. Throughout much of it, the scenery is truly spectacular with clear waterfalls plummeting over magnificent rivers, and high peaks towering above pine valleys and broad expanses of forest. Vast regions remain virtually untouched by travelers, leaving the adventurous with plenty of scope for discovery. In fact, beyond the tourist centers of Baguio, Sagada and Banaue, even hotels and restaurants are rare.

This is not a trip for the faint hearted. The terrain in the Cordillera varies from rough to rougher. The mountains are steep and local trails take the straightest route between two places, which usually means straight up. The roads are frequently closed by landslides during the rainy season. Vegetation changes abruptly with altitude and location — lower areas of grassland or tropical rainforest give way to thick pine. Higher still, dense mountain forests are draped in thick ribbons of moss and orchids.

However, for the intrepid traveler, this northern provincial area in the Philippines presents a rare opportunity to have

direct contact with tribal folk, to sleep in their homes and share their food. The Cordillera is the ancestral domain of the Igorots, who are grouped into six ethno-linguistic groups: the Bontoc, Ibaloi, Ifugao, Isneg, Kalinga and Kankanay.

Manila is the obvious place to start. Make your way north to Baguio, which is the undisputed nerve center of the Cordillera and a gateway to Banaue, Sagada and even Kalinga further north. The trip from the capital to Baguio can take four to five hours by car and six hours by bus.

Armed with a good map, a backpack, and a sturdy means of transportation, one can set out on the road and engage in a real expedition. Remember that the Cordillera can get chilly, a sometimes welcome change from the heat of Manila or beach destinations. Enjoy the last of the urban comforts of Baguio as you gradually move on to the province of Benguet where you descend to the fertile vegetable farmlands of La Trinidad Valley. The scenery during this trip is spectacular. The Halsema Highway, which connects many of the main towns »»

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**Above:** The world famous mud-walled terraces of Banaue are an iconic sight in the Philippines; **Opposite:** Taking a moment to admire Bangaan on the way to Batad. **Following spread:** Morning breaks in Batad.

















in the Cordillera, curves and winds through the mountains reaching heights close to 3,000 meters.

As you approach the world-famous terraces of Banaue you'll hobnob with the welcoming tribes of Kankanays. One of the great iconic sights in the Philippines, the terraces were tilled 2000 years ago by Ifugao tribesmen using primitive tools. Called the "stairway to heaven" by the Ifugaos, the terraces would stretch 20,000 kilometers, if laid out end to end. Not only are they stunning, they are also an object lesson in sustainability. The massive expanse of organic mud-walled rice terraces covering entire mountainsides is bound to awe even the most jaded traveler and they differ from the stone-walled terraces found in the rest of the region.

Banaue sits in the heart of Ifugao country and in a way it

represents the soul of these proud people. The word Ifugao simply means "hill" – and for the Ifugao people the hill means everything. "An extensive social system exists here," says Harriet Poligon, one of the many local guides. "Before, those who owned the lower, larger terraces were the wealthy elite, the peasant farmers."

Banaue and the surrounding communities remain the best sight in the Cordilleras and its rice terraces have been officially added to the UNESCO World Heritage list, a sign that they will not last forever if they are not preserved and protected. »»

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**Above:** The terraces of Mayoyao are worth a detour; **Below left:** A girl from Sagada; **Right:** Tribeswomen still appear in the markets of Sagada to sell their wares; **Overleaf:** Rice is the most important product of the Cordillera.





Photo: GEORGE TAPAN











**Overleaf:** The Cordillera is home to many stunning waterfalls that form natural pools. **This page (clockwise from above):** The hanging coffins of Sagada; A church amid the forest; An elderly farmer sifts rice.

The walls that link the paddies are beginning to crumble, and there is a shortage of young people to help carry out repairs. What's more, rice farming holds little interest for the younger generations in the Cordillera.

From Banaue, drive further up to Batad, where you can see some of the best landscaped rice paddies. Batad has become something of a pilgrimage for visitors looking for rural isolation. The rice terraces here are at their best one or two months before harvest, becoming bright green then gradually turning gold. Around planting time, the terraces take on a barren naked look. Batad is near the 21-meter high Tappia Waterfall which has a dipping pool for swimming. Here, tattooed men and women from local tribes work the paddy fields. If you dispose of a little more time, go even further east and see the terraces in Mayoyao.

By crossing another mountaintop pass you will get to Sagada after four hours of leisurely driving from Batad, winding past many natural waterfalls along the way. A small town nestled in a pine-covered valley, Sagada is known for the hanging coffins suspended from its limestone cliffs, mostly around Echo Valley. The hanging coffins are an age-old tradition and it was considered a privilege to be buried this way. Caves also

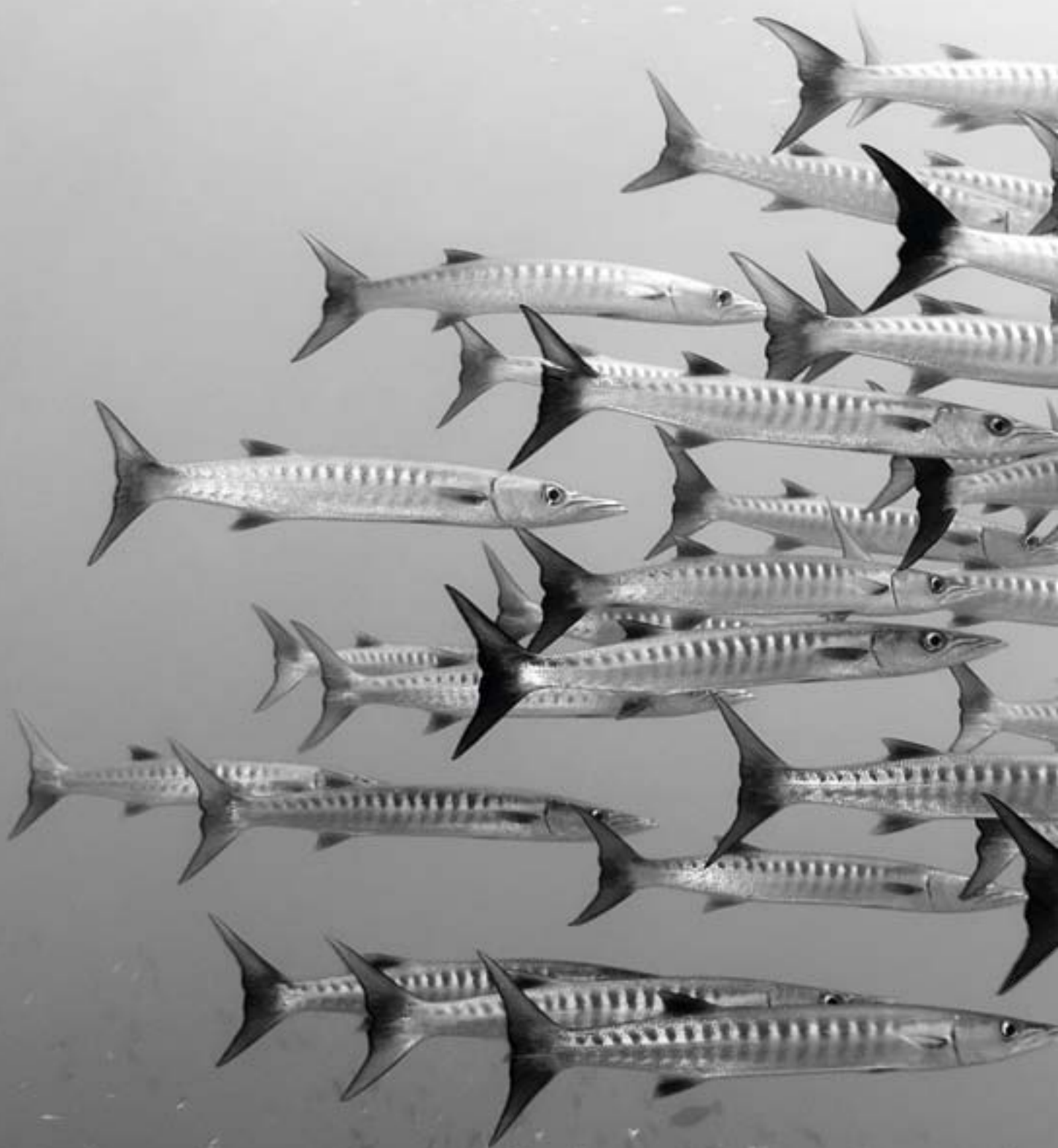
abound in Sagada, the most popular of which is Sumaging, which has an unusual formation. Nearby Matangkib is a burial cave area that will take you to Latang, an underground river.

Sagada is also home to some exotic culinary preparations including rice that is a different variety to the ordinary rice grown in the lowland. The *tapey*, fermented wine from glutinous rice, is a traditional drink used for rituals here.

Bontoc is a fitting end to this adventure. It is still a lively market town, and though there are less and less tattooed tribesfolk coming down from the hill to sell their wares, they may still be seen occasionally. Should you want to continue on to the almost inaccessible, mysterious province of Kalinga, you may do so after stopping in Bontoc. Kalinga is the home of erstwhile fierce headhunters, and only those who truly want to escape civilization will venture here. The scenery is still spectacular, but even the rudimentary comforts that you've experienced outside the bigger towns in the Cordillera will be absent.

Kalinga would qualify as one of the last frontiers, but much of the Cordillera, though at times physically challenging, will certainly count among the greatest and most fascinating experiences any traveler can undergo. □





•SCHOOLING BARRACUDA  
(SPHYRAENA LUCASANDA).  
APO ATOLL.

A large school of barramundi fish is swimming in clear, shallow water. The fish are silver with dark vertical stripes and are arranged in a loose, diagonal formation, moving from the upper left towards the lower right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white, suggesting a bright, sunlit underwater environment. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

# DESTINATION: UNDERWATER

THE PHILIPPINES IS PART OF THE CORAL TRIANGLE, CONSIDERED TO BE THE GLOBAL EPICENTER OF MARINE BIODIVERSITY. THE RICH WATERS AROUND THE ARCHIPELAGO OFTEN PRESENT AMAZING SIGHTS, FROM THE SMALLEST TO THE BIGGEST SPECIES. AN INCREDIBLE PLAYGROUND FOR DIVERS, THIS SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATION HAS AN ASTONISHING UNIVERSE TO BE DISCOVERED – AND NOT JUST ON LAND.

PHOTOS: OCEAN GEOGRAPHIC / MICHAEL AW.COM



• WHALE SHARK  
(*RHINCODON TYPUS*).  
DONSOL.



• DEEP SEA JELLYFISH  
(*ATOLLA GIGANTEA*).  
CELEBES SEA.



• GREEN SEA TURTLE  
(*CHELONIA MYDAS*).  
DIMAKAYA ISLAND.

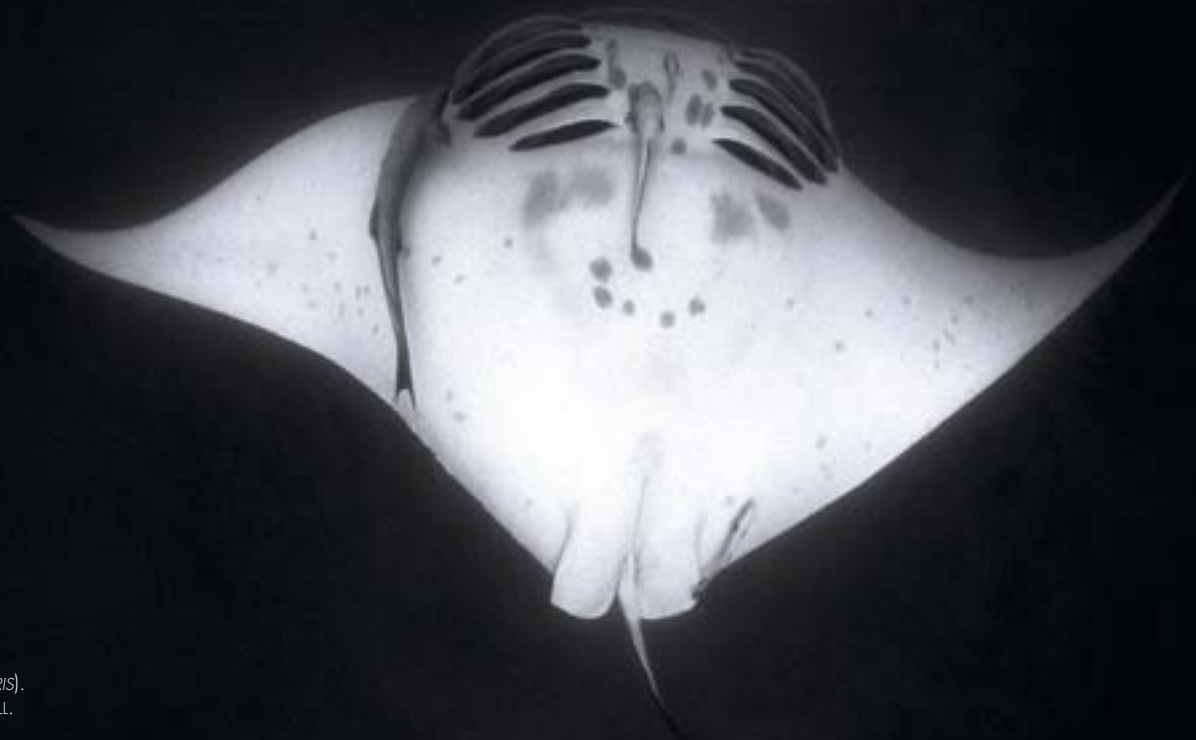




• SWIMMING WORM  
(POLYCHAETA, UNDESCRIBED).  
CELEBES SEA.



• MANTA  
(MANTA BIROSTRIS).  
TUBBATAHA ATOLL.





• PELAGIC SEA CUCUMBER  
(*ENYPNATES EXIMA*).  
CELEBES SEA.





• HARLEQUIN PIPEFISH  
(*SOLENOTOMUS PARADOXUS*).  
ANILAO.



# MAGIC in MABINI

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CASITA YSABEL IS THE LABOR OF LOVE OF LINDA ROMUALDEZ. WHAT STARTED AS A FAMILY GETAWAY IN MABINI BECAME A RESORT AND SPA WHOSE EVERY CORNER IS FILLED WITH CHARM, AND WHICH SERVES AS THE PICTURE-PERFECT PLATFORM FOR DIVING TRIPS INTO THE RICH WATERS OF BALAYAN BAY.

TEXT: CARMEN MOURA PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI



I may spend a long time trying to think how to start this text but at the end of the day I need to come right out and say it: After 60 countries and hundreds of hotels and resorts, Casita Ysabel is where I want to be, as often as possible and for as long as possible.

It's not that I don't appreciate the past allure of high-end hotels and their marble bathrooms, flat screen TVs and obsequious service. It's that with time – and a lot of traveling – you come to crave that ineffable quality that comes from the personal touch; the *je ne sais quoi* that permeates a place where there is a guiding spirit behind everything.

The good fairy in this case is Linda Romualdez, Casita's owner and creator. She first came to Mabini to accompany her children on their diving trips. Two and a half hours south of Manila, the region is often known to Manileños as "Anilao", which is in fact just one stretch of Mabini. It was discovered by divers in the 1970s because of its incredible biodiversity. In 2002 Linda fell in love with and bought a plot of land on the edge of the sea and built a structure for family and friends. Five years later, after renting some rooms occasionally, she decided to turn Casita into a full time resort with a spa called Tre Earth offering signature treatments.

There was no overall master plan for Casita. A lover of the environment, which she fights to protect, Linda felt her way gradually to what the resort is nowadays and added structures and details piece by piece, step by step, so that they blend with the nature around them. There are now eight rooms at Casita, six in the upper floors of the two original buildings and two Balinese style cottages built by architect Clifford Espinosa. The rooms and cottages are named after Linda's daughters, and it is Katrina, the cottage closest to the sea, which is the *pièce de résistance* with its thatched dome, carved wooden interior and high ceiling. Open the wall-to-wall glass doors that lead to the sea and the ones that face the garden in the back, ensconce



LINDA FELT HER WAY TO WHAT THE RESORT IS TODAY STEP BY STEP, SO THAT ALL DETAILS IN CASITA YSABEL BLEND WITH THE NATURE AROUND THEM.







yourself in the big bed surrounded by the mosquito net that billows with the night breeze like a white jelly fish and you'll sleep to the sound of crickets and geckos, and wake up to a stunning view of sea, pastel skies and rolling green hills across the strait.


Linda herself will probably greet you at breakfast, which is held in one of the original buildings on a terrace overlooking the sea and garden. While she orders appetizing dishes from the kitchen like cinnamon rolls, herb omelettes and fresh fruit, Linda can help you plan your day in her unflappable, occasionally mischievous, but highly efficient way as she's followed about by her shitzu Kali.

A morning snorkel in front of Casita is probably the best way to discover just how magical the place is: almost literally at your doorstep there is a marine reserve teeming with underwater life. Wade or swim past the rocks in front of Casita and you will be rewarded by a gorgeous array of coral ranging from purple to green with nearly every color in between. The changing current keeps bringing surprises here. On

different days and at different times of the day you will spot angel fish, box fish, blow fish, pipe fish, needle fish, nudibranches, lobsters, crabs, schools of mackerel swimming open-mouthed to catch smaller prey, squid, jelly fish and even a resident turtle. If you're very lucky you might catch sight of a whale shark diverted from its path during its annual migration.

But don't forget that Mabini and neighboring Tingloy have world-class dive spots. An enthusiastic diver herself, Linda can arrange a boat, equipment and dive masters or even certified instructors for a full course should you stay long enough. They'll arrive by sea on a *bangka* at the appointed time to take you to one or more of the marine sanctuaries within reach, all with their particular characteristics. Flow with the current at Beatrice, swim with the jackfish in Twin Rocks or simply enjoy the amazing amount of sea life behind Sombrero. You can also profit to have a picnic on the sandy shores of neighboring islands while you rest between dives: Casita's staff will pack a basket of tasty treats for you. >>





Lunch is one of the high points of a stay at Casita: Linda creates menus which combine ingredients that she finds on her own land or at the local market with traditional Filipino recipes and international touches. Some of the recurring dishes have been created or taught to her by her guests. A visiting Swiss chef, for example, developed a hibiscus tempura, using the flower that is found everywhere in the garden. The appetizer might be tasty goat meat cooked in light tomato sauce and a soup of papaya and *malunggay*, a local nutritious leaf, followed by char-grilled tuna and a salad of fresh palm hearts accompanied by rosé wine, upon request.

After lunch there are many corners in Casita for relaxing, all of them bearing the stamp of Linda's taste and her preference for indigenous materials such as bamboo, wood, shell, pebbles and textiles from the northern region of Ilocos. Climb the wooden ladder to the second story of an open hut in front of the sea where you can read or snooze on comfortable cushions; or play a game of backgammon in the outdoor living room. Around two or three in the afternoon you might catch sight of the fins of black-tipped reef sharks as they come close to the shore, but if you venture on an afternoon swim they will vanish as quickly as they appeared.

No one should leave Casita without taking advantage of the ministrations of Linda's spa. Two open-air rooms are located below the Balinese cottages – you will be separated from the sounds of the garden and the waves by just a flowing curtain. Ask for the signature massage and follow it with a volcanic ash mask which leaves your skin baby-soft after a day in the sun.

If you time your massage right you will be able to enjoy the many extraordinary sunsets at Casita: the sky becomes hot pink and the sun a huge golden ball reflected on the water. Take a kayak and paddle out a few meters from the shore to fully appreciate the spectacle. When you finish dinner relax on lounge chairs under the colorful lamps hanging from the trees in the shady woods behind the garden.

After a day of activities, sun and relaxation, you will probably start feeling a healthy somnolence. The wonderful thing is that as you fall asleep inside your mosquito net, lulled by the night creatures around you, you'll know that you can wake up to do it all over again. ☐

For reservations visit: [www.casitaysabel.com](http://www.casitaysabel.com)

# VIEW TO THE SEA

JUST TWO AND A HALF HOURS' DRIVE FROM THE CAPITAL, MABINI IS A PARADISE FOR DIVERS. ACACIA RESORT OFFERS A GOOD RESTING PLACE BETWEEN EXCURSIONS.

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI

**I**n the 1970s, attracted by the incredible underwater life around the reefs of Mabini, divers used to come and camp in a stretch called Anilao, sleeping next to their own tanks.

Mabini, which is still known popularly as Anilao, is in fact the closest prime scuba diving destination to Manila. What it lacks in white sand beaches it makes up for with the several sanctuaries and protected areas where a large number of marine species can be appreciated. Today it is also a resort town with a privileged view of the sea and excellent diving within reach.

Inaugurated in 2008, Acacia is one of the resorts catering to divers who come to the region. Functional buildings with straight white lines harbor large, well lit, air-conditioned rooms. Outside, a century-old acacia tree dominates the pool area, where new divers can take their first practical lessons.

But the sea is where you'll want to be when staying here. Fueled by constant winds and underwater currents that change systematically following the moon's cycles, this unique environment is said to be one of the centers of biodiversity in the world.

Each dive is a story on its own. It will vary according to the divers' capacity to observe the environment, especially if it is one as diverse as this. While extravagantly colored nudibranches are arguably the region's mascots, providing

for excellent macro photography, a day's dive may yield the sight of blacktip reef sharks, hawksbill turtles, a rare frog fish or even, on extraordinary occasions, the docile whale shark.

Night dives reveal astonishing gardens of soft corals and unusual creatures like ghost pipe fishes and blue-ringed octopuses, while the intricate delicacy of coral gardens during the day display a multitude of shapes, textures and colors.

A professional dive master with the gift of spotting flora and fauna that use camouflaging techniques for survival is an asset to any dive. Marlou, Acacia's resident dive master, knows the 27 dives available in Mabini by heart, and he can spot miniature creatures like whip coral shrimp or tiny anemone crabs that would probably otherwise go unnoticed.

While Mabini's most popular dive sites like Cathedral and Twin Rocks suit beginners perfectly, others, especially in the vicinity of Sombrero Island, feature walls and strong currents that challenge more experienced divers. Beatrice is a site where hammer head sharks used to be a regular sight till the mid 1980s, according to local fishermen. Unfortunately this beautiful creature is no longer around, but a dive in Beatrice still provides a thrilling experience as the current pushes you for miles in the company of thousands of small red anthiases feeding amid the reef's gorgonian corals. □







# JOINING THE VIPs

BY JESSICA ZAFRA

ILLUSTRATION: DAN MATUTINA

Philippine elections are famously dramatic. A quarter of a century ago the world was galvanized by images of ordinary citizens defending democracy with their lives. The photographs in the international news media summed up the emotionally-charged events: opposition political candidates defying the guns and goons of the Marcos regime, citizens embracing ballot boxes to protect them from the thugs attempting to steal their elections, computer programmers walking out on the official election count to protest widespread electoral fraud, and finally, millions of Filipinos pouring out onto the streets in support of their candidate, the widowed housewife Cory Aquino.

Those were heady days for the Filipinos, the media, and the whole concept of democracy. The world watched as ordinary, unarmed citizens overthrew a dictatorship through non-violent means. Those events on EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the main highway of Metro Manila) in 1986 came to be known as the People Power Revolution. People Power in the Philippines was a spark that touched off democratic movements across the world. The Czechs had their Velvet Revolution, the Ukrainians their Orange. The South Koreans evicted a dictator. In Berlin the Wall fell, and the collapse of the Soviet Union began.

A second EDSA revolt in 2000 – to depose a president widely viewed as corrupt (and a very popular actor) – was not viewed kindly by the international news media: Time magazine headlined its report “Oops, we did it again.”

The recently-concluded Philippine election had obvious parallels with that election in 1986. An Aquino – Benigno Simeon Aquino, “Noynoy”, son of the late president – was running once again, on the promise to fight corruption. Many familiar faces were seeking a return to office, and many showbiz personalities were looking to make the shift to politics.

The campaign was intense, as always. Doomsday scenarios flew, most of them connected to election automation. For the first time in

our history, the polls would be automated. The proponents of election automation said it would do away with cheating; the opponents said it would facilitate fraud.

On May 10, 2010, the Filipinos went to the polls. There were reports of violence and vote-buying, and the expected technical glitches, but these were fairly isolated, minor incidents. We had achieved the near-impossible: efficient, peaceful, drama-free elections. (The accusations of cheating would come later, at a congressional inquiry, but these protests did not achieve the operatic heights we were used to.) Then there was the electoral equivalent of hell freezing over: the losing candidates conceded defeat. One month after the general election, Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Aquino was officially proclaimed the President of the Republic of the Philippines.

These are heady times, for different reasons. The Filipinos have demonstrated that their commitment to democracy goes beyond the noise and the histrionics. We remain passionate about democracy, but now we can express this passion with calm, sobriety, and efficiency. The 2010 elections show that we are growing up.

For too long, the nation’s economic gains have been overshadowed by political division. After the success of the automated elections, attention may now be paid to the Philippines as an emerging market.

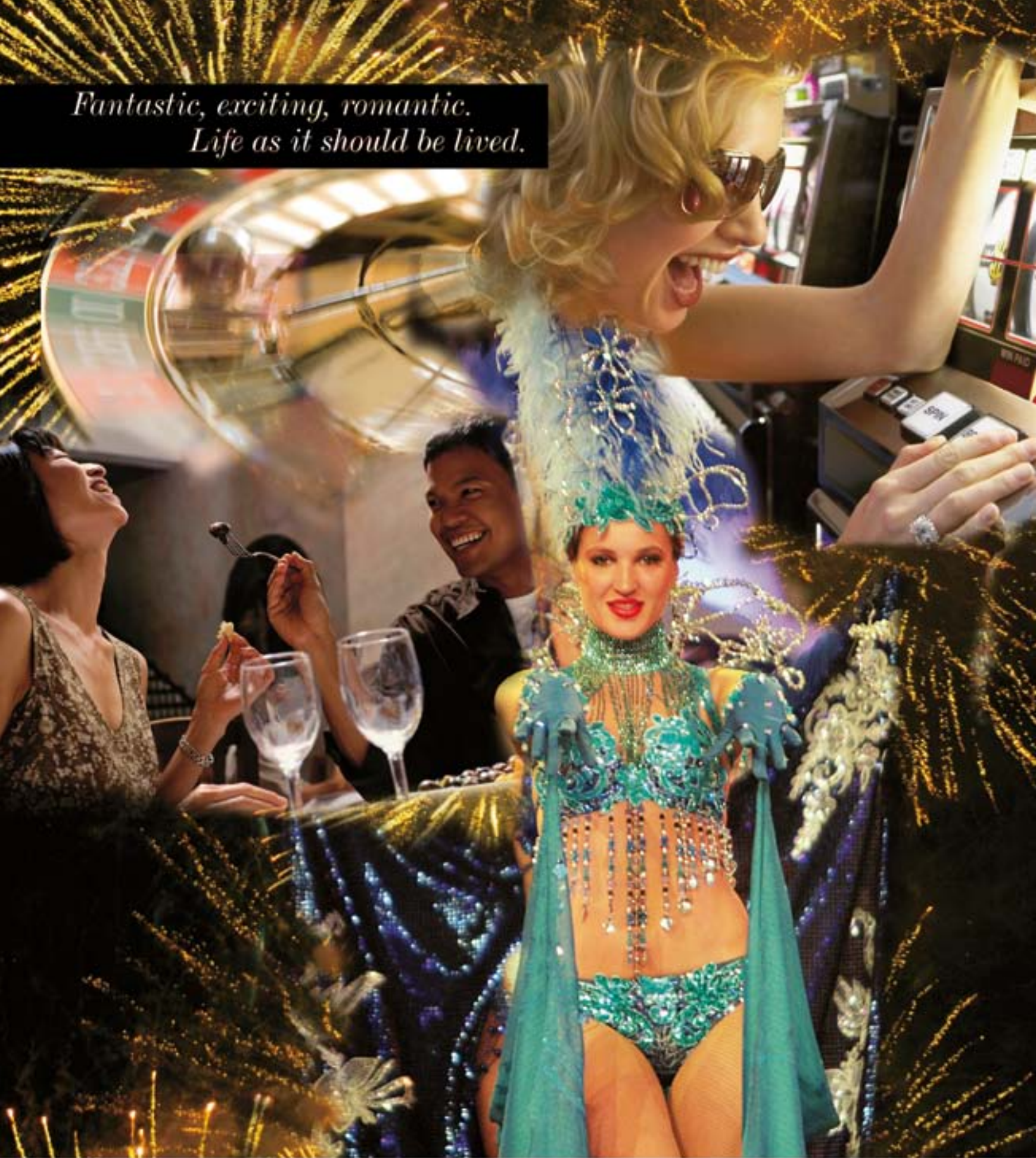
Not only did the Philippine economy weather the global economic meltdown, but it remains recession-free, highlighting its potential for future growth.

The economists who predicted the rise of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) now regard VIP – Vietnam, Indonesia, and yes, the Philippines – as the most promising players in the global economy. The markets may now view us as a safe and solid investment rather than a volatile dramatic showcase. We have shown a new political maturity; now we can get down to business.

In 1986, Philippine democracy was reborn after 14 years of martial rule, and in 2010 it grew up. That’s 24 years: a mere blip in the arc of history. I’d say we’re doing pretty well. □



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