

Living With the Land – A Visionary's Viewpoint

'Bodge' Wallingford from New Zealand and his life partner, Thailand's Kanya Jitnaree are situated on the airy, wooden deck of their grass-roofed abode; stationed as an island in the middle of an expansive rice field.

“Wherever we are, we have a life. What do we call our life? Do we borrow from someone else's life, or do we create our own?”
Bodge Wallingford



Bees are buzzing around. A duo of brownish-colored birds are frantically making a valiant attempt at copulating, barnyard frolic-style, in the nearby tree arched over a muddy-watered, man-made pond.

Bodge and "Ya" are living, an agricultural life.

While eating a scrumptious, home-cooked meal comprised predominantly of the fruits from their own labor, Bodge admits, "This was supposed to be a small, permaculture, self-sufficient, family, hobby farm where we would grow vegetables, have some chickens and read books on lazy, hot afternoons. You know; no sweat.

"I've never worked so hard in my life, like these past few years," he added with a hearty laugh.

Bodge, 64, lives as a tireless visionary. Formerly tending livestock on substantially-sized tracts of land in New Zealand and Australia, his inner dreamland and ability to manifest material reality is seemingly limited only by the physical space available to him.

Just beyond the outskirts of Chiang Mai, he and Ya have *together* taken a geographic blank page and built a home comprising intelligently-managed rice cultivation, stock-raising and bringing up two daughters. Vision for a "farm stay" for those desiring to "wake up in the morning and look at farmers a few yards away working rice" is also potentially in the works.

Clad in shorts and a thin, flannel-type shirt displaying a fraying rip over his right shoulder, Bodge pointed out exactly where the next components of his vision will materialize.

"Everybody has influences, all of the time," he had humbly admitted, while at the table. "Nothing is original. The only original thing you can do is mix a bit of this with that, and it comes into maybe being a unique thing by itself. Look at the use of color.

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Apparently, it's just this simple. However, Bodge has at times been discouraged regarding the farm. "After a couple of years, I asked myself, 'What the hell am I doing this for?' But sometimes, you're riding home; the dog is behind you; it's been a good day; the weather is good; the sun is going down. And just for a moment, you have extreme happiness and think, 'Wow. This is great. This is so good.' And just a few of these moments keep you going for another week of labor."

Metaphorically speaking, it is the general climate - the ambience - in Thailand (and the Chiang Mai area) which is sowing these philosophical seeds.

"I really love Thailand. We all have our frustrations and doubts at times. I've tried to leave. Others have tried to leave. However, they go home and feel alienated. Because (people there) are often educated but not connected to the rest of the world.

"I think *foreigners* are lucky to live in Thailand," added Bodge. "It would be better to have a more sure deal, to own something that we can call our own. Not in the sense of wanting to colonize the country, just to be able to live and exercise a life here."

His life-building efforts have certainly come with a plethora of personal, economic and bureaucratic challenges. However, where there's a will, there's a way. And he fearlessly forges onward.

Bodge maintains that, "The planet belongs to us all. I hate nationalism, loathe it." However, "We're aliens here (in Thailand), and we're always going to be seen as such. And we better get comfortable with this fact... I'd like to be sitting on a tractor and tilling my neighbors' fields." However, this may result in crossing a line with Thai immigration.

Regardless, "If you have a dream, want it to go forward, and follow every single petty law that mankind can produce, then kiss your dream good-bye."

Integrating into the lives of the local people is ranked highly on Bodge and Ya's priority list, and they appear thoroughly linked with their environment.

While Bodge, which in New Zealand means "craftsman," stood sturdily in the verdant field which he somewhat respectfully shares with rice stock-wrecking snails and scampering crabs, he was able to thoughtfully address the life of each neighbor located in the distance - slightly bent over, working their land.

He believes one of the most notable societal problems is that, "Everything is separated, boxed and specialized nowadays. Then we're not connected, and society loses its context - how to connect together... People have a need to breathe and have a feeling for their land, space and environment.

"We (he and Ya) would like to be integrated as much as we can," added Bodge. "We are as interested in agricultural productivity as our neighbors... We live with a common interest. If they have a problem (such as with weather and crop disease), we have the same problem."

Standing next to this virtuous man, one perhaps can absorb a sense of the deep-rooted love and appreciation he has for his land and lifestyle.

Could he give it all up?
"There are times I get so tired. But in the back of my mind, I don't want to give it up. I don't want to stop it." If ever having to move onto new pastures, "I would walk away and feel sad that I hadn't finished as much as I would like to finish.

"I'd like to finish what you can see is being attempted. Right now, you'd look at it and think, 'What is this guy doing? He's left mounds of dirt everywhere and ruined a very nice rice field.'"

Delving into the nitty-gritty, a primary motive for Bodge's efforts: family. "I don't want my children to be rich," he admits, adding sentiments about also cultivating a good life for Ya. "But I do want them to have a chance in a very competitive world."

Bodge Wallingford: a valiant visionary, indeed...

