People who have lived in Bali for any length of time will agree that house maintenance can be a bit of a problem to say the least. We learn to live with toilets that don’t work very well, water pumps that go on the blink and electrical supplies that can cut out at any time.

The many people who rent houses in Bali are often faced with landlords that just don’t want to know or who patch things up to limp along to the next failure. It also seems that when a house is built here maintenance is simply not a consideration.

For the growing number of people building or buying property in Bali it is advisable to carefully consider ongoing maintenance of your precious investment at an early stage. All too often fixing that broken water pipe will require hacking great holes in your spectacular marble lined bathroom or, worse still, your beautiful two storey palace has been built on poor foundations and has serious cracks through it.

People in Indonesia seem to have a blind spot when it comes to maintenance. I put it down to a fundamental quality in the local culture - Indonesians live in the moment. People from western countries have long lost this ability, we spend our time regretting the past and planning for the future. A local person once explained this to me pointing out that European peoples had to plan ahead or they would not survive the winter while in the tropics food could be picked from a tree at anytime.

Perhaps this ability to live in the moment is why the people of Bali are able to quickly pick themselves up and move on in their lives and why they are always able to smile.

Unfortunately this wonderful quality has a down side. Planning for tomorrow is not a common practice and the concept of cause and effect (if I do this now that will happen tomorrow) is little understood. I remember the frustration of trying to convince my sister in law that in future she should wear a crash helmet with a strap after she fell off a motorbike and was unconscious for four hours.

This lack of foresight is a major issue for property maintenance and an important consideration for anyone building or buying property. We have to remember that when a house is built what could occur in the future is not foremost in the builders mind. The consequences of leaving half of the cement out of the foundations, of poor electrical work or burying the pipework in floors and walls are simply not considered.

It should also be remembered that in Indonesia there are no meaningful formal training systems or work standards for tradespeople, your “plumber” may have been selling watches on the beach last week, and as a result many buildings suffer from sub standard installations. Add to this the fact that many materials and fittings used are of very low quality and the problems are further exacerbated.

In the face of such doom and gloom do not despair. Bali is a beautiful place to live and the inconveniences are part of the quirkiness of living in paradise. We have to accept that we will not change the system overnight; we have to understand the way things are and work around them. There are many steps you can take to reduce your frustrations and safeguard your property.
If you are renting a property it is wise to anticipate that the landlord may be very reluctant to pay for property maintenance, build that consideration into the initial price negotiation and, if he or she doesn't look after you, organise your own maintenance.

If you are building make sure that good quality materials and fittings are specified, that design work is sound and above all make sure that someone you can trust closely supervises all construction work. Remember - the temptation to leave out expensive materials such as reinforcing steel or cement, or to use lower quality fittings in order to make a bit of money on the side is just too great for people who are not as wealthy as the average house owner.

If you are buying an existing property get it inspected by an independent person who can provide sound advice about the standard of construction and regarding any maintenance issues that may have already started to show.

You should always check the stability of the land and the strength of foundations. Just about anything else can be fixed up later on but if your palace is built on a poor foundation that in turn is on old paddy fields you may have a problem that is very difficult to solve.

Perhaps it is also wise to anticipate that you may have to progressively upgrade services as time goes on. When that cheap water pump gives up the ghost you can replace it with a good one.

With the new property boom and international buyers standards are steadily improving in Bali. These days high quality imported electrical and plumbing fittings are readily available. The choice of architects and builders is expanding.

At the end of the day, if the worst comes to the worst, building costs are still relatively low here and even major building work will not break the bank.

If you don’t get too lost in the dream of owning a home in Bali, you accept the local culture and you keep your wits about you it is possible to avert many future problems and have an enjoyable and relaxed life in what is a wonderful place to live.

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