

Rancho Mastatal Updates

March 2010

The summer internship is beginning to wrap up as we start to say our goodbyes to the first folks to leave from the amazing crew that's been with us since mid-January. The Ranch has arguably transformed more this winter than during any other three-month period since we arrived to Mastatal. The food systems have undisputedly improved in profound ways since the New Year and we are eternally grateful to all that participated in this metamorphosis, especially to FRANCES and NICOLE for heading up what could be termed our "first food revolution". We now have an infrastructure in place that will allow us to produce an increasingly incalculable amount of fruits, vegetables and dairy products for the Ranch and perhaps someday the greater community of Mastatal. We feel as prepared as ever for the Permaculture Workshop that we're hoping to host this upcoming July with Bona Fide's CHRIS SHANKS so please help us get the word out. It could be epic. There's more information on our website under the [Events Calendar](#).



Our bean field

BONNIE and ALICE, our resident goats, are as cute as ever as they continue helping us clear new space in preparation for the planting of fruit producing and nitrogen-fixing trees on the newly coined "Goat Slope" and we've recently added another 20 laying hens to our growing collection of avian creatures. We're hoping to put in a pond with tilapia, carp and catfish in the coming weeks. Ducks may follow. And maybe even a pig someday. The busiest of our busy season has come to an end as we prepare for a quieter period and time to fully immerse ourselves in our countless list of projects. With this transition comes the wetter months and innumerable shades of green. Sole continues to thrive, speaking her first sentences, kicking like Mia Hamm, and keeping everyone's spirits high. This transitional period is full of coming and going that can take its emotional toll but it's a beautiful time to be in Mastatal. Please bring us up to speed when you can. In the meantime, be well. We send you all our best.

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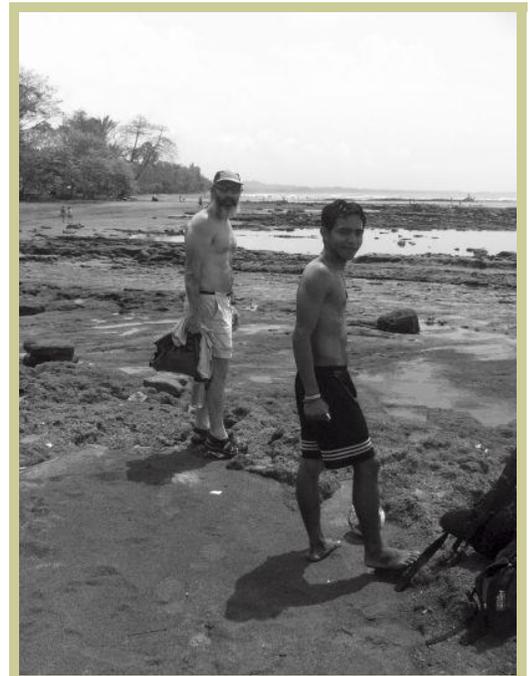
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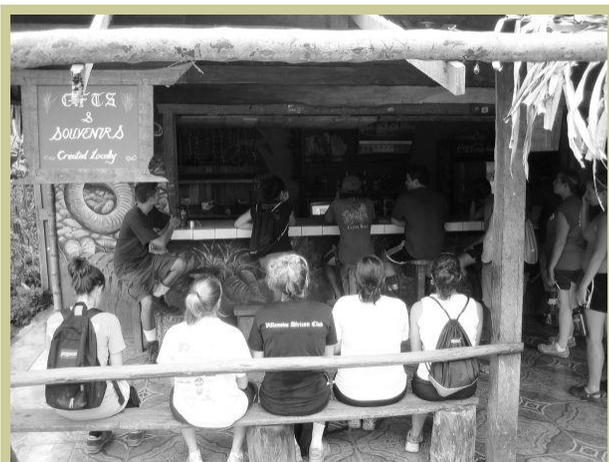
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RM Program News: Villanova Shines Yet Again

As they always do, the service-oriented crew from Villanova banged out another full week of community work and spiritual growth this past month, while providing a pleasant, happy presence here at the Ranch. After a long month of 40 people living and eating together, an at-times draining experience for interns and cooks, the low-maintenance feel of Villanova's group made for a nice respite from the crowds. TIBURON kept this year's group busy in the forests and schools, getting dirty doing trail maintenance in the national park and helping the elementary school with their own gardens. As always, it was a tremendous cultural experience for the students, who have been recorded as saying they'll never forget this week in their lives. We believe them, and express our gratitude for all their selfless dedication, flexibility and genuine openness to new experiences – we wish you all the best in the future.



*Tiburon and Junior at Cristal Beach
photo by Derrick M Benton*



The Cantina

photo by John Oles

Conservation Report: A Reminiscence

One Saturday seven years ago, I sat with my back against what was the old cantina. I was sharing a beer with Robin and Gollo, who, recently having joined us in Mastatal, was remarking on such a special place this was. La Cangreja spoke to us as we soaked in a quiet afternoon in a town that saw little more than horse and foot traffic, even on a weekend. While it was not uncommon to pick up the distant droning of a chainsaw coming from off in the forest somewhere, little else made much of a ruckus in Mastatal. Inside the dark dungeon of a bar, the owner lingered with a comrade over drinks of undoubtedly a stronger variety. After a little while, the men came outside and started heading towards the bar owner's house, casual as can be. As we sat and finished our beers, that familiar sound abruptly pierced the

afternoon tranquility, its source not in the forest but up close and personal at the crossroads of town. For the next ten minutes we watched in horror as the men proceeded to cut down a giant Guanacaste, one of the most recognizable trees in town, not to mention the country's national arbol. To witness the death of what seemed to be a perfectly healthy, unquestionably beautiful tree was enough to bring Robin to tears. We later discovered that the decision was made because Bolivar, who was in the process of building a new bar on his property, did not want the tree's leaves and branches to fall on and damage the roof. It was a tough one to swallow, but there was little we could do but lament the loss. In the end, some of the wood from the tree was used in the construction of the bar, but the remaining stump at the crossroads was the greater reminder of what once was.

It's hard to believe how much has happened since that fateful day seven years ago. Across from the old cantina stands the Salon Comunal, its entrance flanked by giant bunches of vetiver grass. Several years ago Timo brought to Mastatal one single cutting of this erosion-control grass, from which countless

bunches have since been spread around town. The old bar itself is now a middle school and internet café, the latter being something I never could have imagined as I sat with Robin and Gollo that day. And while I remain slightly troubled by the presence of modern technology and motorbikes in Mastatal, I continue to revel in the same things that first empowered my spirit so many years ago. Indeed, amidst all the changes, the progress, the "development" that has hit Mastatal, one can still look up to La Cangreja and bask in her unwavering majesty. She endures as the stalwart of the region, where the scarlet macaws are as present as ever. Outside the park, the droning of the chainsaw remains a constant, but so does the need for renewable resources, of which trees are one of the most important. Sure, it's hard to see a big one go, but it's also reassuring to see it continue to provide, spreading like vetiver through the hearts and homes of the world.

Brujita

Building Report: The Return of Skippy Skippy Bad Boy

Following a one-year hiatus due to lack of student enrollment, SKIP DEWHIRST was back to join his partner-in-crime LIZABETH MONIZ in leading this year's much-anticipated Yestermorrow Natural Building course. They were blessed with a group of exceptionally motivated and easy-going students, which included architects, builders and many first-timers, who hit the ground running on the new biodigester toilet. With ALEX, JUNIOR and ADELAIDE busting out the foundation in plenty of time prior to the group's arrival, the class followed suit by pumping out a beautiful two-seater design in their first three days. After sharing ideas and feedback with the interns, it was time to get to building, and the deck flew up in a matter of days. The design includes bamboo posts, beams and rafters, wattle and daub walls with louvered slats for privacy, and two options for making your ever-so-valuable deposit. One side will sport a recycled porcelain toilet, while the other will allow for squatting and a pull-down flush. The group did well to incorporate the needs of maintaining the digester, the differing comfort levels of its users, the educational value of the structure and the permaculture properties of the nearby banana terraces. Indeed, it was an ass-kicking ten days for the group, who were on site wattleing and daubing right up to the end. Many thanks to everyone for their hard work and dedication, in particular to Skip and Lizabeth for their brilliant leadership and good humor. Believe or not, it's been eight years since they first came to Mastatal, and their contributions to both the infrastructure and spirit of this community are too numerous and valuable to describe. We love you guys.



Jose Luis Zuniga doing the brick work for the Ranch's methane biodigester

In other building news, ANDREW has nearly completed the plans for the new timber frame carport over by Jeannie's. AMY has been plugging away at a goat stantion for Bonnie and Alice, while GREG continues his furniture frenzy in the shop, recently completing a beautiful starfish-headboard bed for SUCIA. (For \$2500 a week, you too can enjoy slumbering in majesty under a solar-powered fan after a warm shower in the newly completed bathroom.) Meanwhile, plans for the CLSC have been submitted to the municipality for approval, which will hopefully come soon to kick-start construction. Stay tuned...

Farm Facts: Dig, Turn, Plant, Repeat

It's a fresh new look as you walk through the main gates these days. Weeks of surveying and hard-core earth-moving have transformed the "kitchen garden" into a series of long beds and swales, the latter of which being the newest irrigation method implemented by this year's garden guild. Draining out to more beds and swales along the road across from the soda, these long, deep troughs will in theory collect rainwater and allow it to seep into the beds on either side, reducing the need to use valuable spring water to irrigate the garden. Hose-watering in the dry season will be reduced to filling the swales rather than an hour-long session. There's even one swale that has been holding water pretty steadily, becoming a home for fish and frogs. Indeed, the ongoing desire to bring tilapia to the Ranch may come to fruition in more ways than previously imagined. Research continues as to how we will make it happen. Meanwhile, the new beds, double-dug and amended with tierra fermentada, have been nearly all planted out with greens, herbs, fruits and vegetables. This has been a monumental effort taken on by numerous soiled hands and sweaty backs, and the maintenance of these systems will no doubt take the same amount of dedication well into the future. But when it's a labor of love that produces edible goodness, willing and able bodies shouldn't be too hard to come by.



Goats arrived on January 2010

photo by Chris Manning

Meanwhile, the planting party continues around the grounds, with bananas and plantains going in seemingly everywhere you turn. The infamous DON MARIO has also gotten involved by single-handily creating over a dozen yucca mounds on Jeannie's property. The Hankey swales continue to see new growth while the nursery out at "the farm" has sported its first squash fruits and what looks like a forest of amaranth. The goat slope has opened up and plans are in the works for the first plantings. Bonnie and Alice, having enjoyed a couple weeks down in "the bowl" below Jeannie's, are back up in the yucca field, happy and healthy along with the latest additions to the farm. That's right, our laying hen population has nearly doubled with twenty young'uns living in a portable home until they are big enough to roam with the big girls. Sure, it will be months before we see any eggs from these new birds, but in the meantime we'll be profiting from both their poop and their company.

Community Stories: CorkFest Round Two

There were toad circuses and game shows, acoustic acts and full-on band performances, poetry and comedic commercials, shadow puppets, a world class violinist, 3 languages, 3 intermissions (one caused by a driving rain), a steady flow of Chicha and beer, Portugese Punk Rock, sauerkraut and squash empanadas for fifty, and a standing room only crowd.

The 2nd Annual Starboard Cork Music and Entertainment Festival, a culmination of Timo's vision of a music festival and a way to celebrate the construction of, and thank those who have played a part in, the building of Starboard Cork, was attended by approximately 50 people – interns, ranch employees and their families, volunteers, friends and dogs.

Because there were 23 acts throughout the seven-hour fiesta, I won't try to detail individual performances. Here are some highlights. NICOLE "SCONEY" SCORSONE was called the glue of the evening by Robin. Sconey selflessly played music with whoever asked for her accompaniment and beautified the festival with the magic of her Violin, including part of the musical score to "The Godfather" soundtrack in a 3-part

comedic spoof of the movie called "The Godmother", which has become Robin's nickname over the past few years. Those of you who know Robin probably don't need explaining. Thank you SCONEY for bumping up the musical bar at this year's fest. I love you and I'll see ya soon in the Jerse.

Huge thanks to FRANCES, ELYSSA and the full crew of interns and volunteers that made sure the Cork was supplied with amazing empanadas and cake – I can't remember the names of the sea of people in the kitchen dancing and cooking, but it was remarkable to see. GEOFF, thanks for taking days away from building the Cork to turn it into a comfortable performance theater for so many people – and for bartending along with JORDAN and ANDREW. Every single intern and volunteer played a major role either in the kitchen, setting up the space, on stage, behind the scenes, making beer runs, putting aside your days to prep for a big party, and full on committing to the Cork Fest. Thanks to SCOTT, LAURA, GREG, TEAGUE, TYLER, NICOLE, AMY, CHRIS, MIA, TOM, VIKKI, TIAGO, ADELAIDE, TIM, ALEX, TIMO, ROBIN, TOM, SPARKY, CARISSA, BRADFORD and KENDALL for both busting out your creative sides and putting the party together with fine attention to every detail. It's the only way such an event can work – and it worked flawlessly.

A special thanks to PIPPA for being SUCIA and SPARKY'S personal assistant. For two weeks prior to the kickoff PIPPA stayed on top of us, insisting on meetings, keeping us organized and focused and making sure everything that needed to happen, happened. If SCONEY was the musical glue, you were the event glue both off stage and on as the third comedic MC. Thanks PIPPA we miss you!

SPARKY thank goodness you stayed the extra week to see the event through. The CORK FEST will never be the same without your energy on stage and off so as long as there is a Cork-Fest you have to find a way to be here. Love you Sparks.

Thanks to the Montclair, New Jersey band THE PORCHISTAS – DEIVIS "DEIVITO" GARCIA and LOUEY "THE HAND" NORTE – for making the trip, sharing your music, and also for working like horses for weeks before and after the fest. You guys rock in music and life. And thanks TYLER for filling in masterfully on lead guitar for PORCHISTA songs. ADAM FALZER'S guitar "DEVIL HANDS" are not easy to fill and you're the only guitarist I know whose parts fill his spaces perfectly.

Whether luck or the universe, or Timo's ranch scheduling, the Cork Fest has coincided with the presence of the Yestermorrow Natural Building and Design group here at the Ranch. The energies of LIZABETH and SKIP in town for the festivities add an extraordinary element and I hope the dates continue to collide. Mid afternoon the day before the fest, Scone and I passed LIZABETH sitting on the side of the road to the Cork. She then told us that she was trying to think up something for her performance. Up the road a bit more we found SKIP walking around working on a guitar riff. He explained that although he and Lizabeth both create music on their own they haven't been able to bring their styles together to make songs. They were separate on the same road working together to try to bridge that musical gap. I'll remember that moment as representative of the spirit of Cork Fest – working with others to put together a magical festival that celebrates our creative energies. SKIP and LIZBETH performed two wonderful songs together at Cork Fest that they wrote that previous afternoon.

CHIRO brought his 3 string Japanese Sitar called a "Sin-Chi" all the way from Guanacaste, by bus, to be a part of Cork-Fest and headlined the night with a spiritual ode to farmers that incorporated 8 ranch interns on stage with him as dancers representing field workers. The performance was mystifying and reminded us of our daily toils of sustainable living. Thank you CHIRO.

Ending the evening, DEIVITO, accompanied by many, brought the festival back to its name. STARBOARD CORK, a song written by Deivis some years back and still oft-performed by the Porchistas, has grasped the imagination of many and inspired art of all kinds. His dreamscape of a house shaped like a boat on a sea of wine adrift at sea boarded by a husband, wife and twelve kids, was the inspiration for the boat-themed

house at Rancho Mastatal. The crowd sang along and just as the song ended, SOLEDAD, asleep in Geoff's room for most of the evening, woke in ROBIN'S arms. SOLE you are what inspires many of us. You are our HOPE! Thanks TIMO and ROBIN for creating the space for all of this to go down. Until next year, signing off from Starboard Cork. Thanks everyone!

Sucia

Intern/Guest Gossip: *El Viento*

Didn't sleep much the past two nights. The winds have returned to Mastatal, and those of us who were here last year when the winds took off multiple roofs and interrupted our lives for three days and nights, continue to hope that these winds stay tamer than the last. This morning, when I woke at 5:15 a.m., my room was covered with dust, leaves and debris, and my clothes were blown about the floor because the backs of the shelves, awaiting teak slats, were still exposed to the weather. As I journeyed the quarter mile to the main house, the dry winds blew against my face and I was wide-awake. The gravel and dirt road was ruffled with branches and leaves from the hardy jungle trees. It was still dark like night, except for the bright red glow far to my left where the sun would rise in 20 minutes, between far off mountains. A horse grazed on the side of the road unfazed by the potential dangers of El Viento.

I am happy. I am alive. My secret is that I love the wind. No, I don't want to again sort through piles of mangled, metal corrugated roofing to salvage the roofs of community members. I don't want families to again feel the wind's wrath. But I am enamored with its power; it's potential to destroy – to cleanse – to put things into perspective.

But no, we don't need that here. I am not in New Jersey. Perspective. Purpose. Being human. Here I live a life that makes sense. Here I feel like I am closer to what a human experience should be.

In New Jersey people freak out if a heat wave shuts their air conditioners and televisions for a few hours. Here we learn the skills to use our human power and not be so dependent on a system of power and entertainment brought to us by a few multi-national corporations in the interest of maintaining control of us – of wealth - of resources: Water, Energy, Money. We don't need corporations - they need us.

The wind blows on my face and reminds me that it will all be dust one day and a corporation will be a word in a language that no longer exists. Dust to dust.

Sucia

Comida Corner: Mangocakes

A recent breakfast crew threw this one together on a whim. These mango pancakes received enough compliments to earn a spot in this month's newsletter. The following recipe makes about 12 pancakes.



Mango & Bree

photo by Aimee Gaines

Wet ingredients:

Juice from 1 lemon

¼ cup *tapa dulce*

1 ½ cups whey

¼ cup kefir

2 eggs

1 blended mango

Dry ingredients:

½ teaspoon grated orange rind

½ teaspoon baking soda

¾ cup all-purpose flour

¾ cup wheat flour

Mix the wet and dry ingredients separately and then mix together. Cook in a hot cast iron skillet for a minute or so on each side. Top with fresh mango, *tapa dulce*, granola, kefir/yoghurt or your other favorite pancake toppings and enjoy.

Buen provecho

Futbol Follies: Women Raise Funds, Kick Ass

Enjoying a spree of victories and enthusiasm, the Mastatal women's squad recently held a couple of fundraisers in an effort to get themselves new uniforms, having until now either shared the Galacticos yellow jerseys or sported the old, stretched, faded white shirts of Deportivo Mastatal's past. Following their 3-2 come from behind victory in Tulin, the women organized both a chicken-guaro raffle and a Saturday evening of food and cheer in the Salon Comunal to help the cause. Both received a good turnout, especially from a large group at the Ranch, making the goal of buying new uniforms a reality. On the field, meanwhile, they've continued to dominate their opponents, most recently in Los Angeles, where the goal tally was high enough to stop counting. We look forward to watching their success continue.

The men produced some solid victories in the month of March in San Vicente and Los Angeles, thanks in large part to the return of GINO and TIMO to the defensive line. The schedule is unclear for the future, though rumors of upcoming events in Montelimar and Mastatal have been spreading. On the global front, UEFA Champions League quarterfinal action is heating up, while the *Copa Mundial* lingers ever-so closer on the horizon. And yes, believe it or not, satellite TV has arrived at the soda, so no worries about missing a match. Trouble, maybe, but when it comes to futbol, it's certainly convenient for the truefanaticos out there.



Workshop crew, lucky Greg

Inspirational Impressions: When Science Meets Magic

Quotes from a performance by CHRIS, MIA and TOM at this year's CorkFest:

The basic unit of a solar electric system is the photovoltaic cell that converts sunlight into electricity. When sunlight strikes a cell, electrons are excited and generate an electrical voltage and current that is carried through wires to an electrical circuit. – Solar Energy International

A secret turning in us makes the universe turn,
Head aware of feet, and feet aware of head. Neither cares. They keep turning. - Rumi

It is ironic that even with the abundance of energy with which nature endows us, we find this essential commodity in short supply. But actually it's not energy that we lack, it is the know-how to tap more of this energy. - Carol Hopping Stoner

Walk to the well. Turn as the earth and the moon turn, circling what they love. Whatever circles comes from the center. - Rumi

The solar path is simple: use less energy and make sure that energy comes from a renewable resource. - Amory Lovins

Dance, when your broken open.
Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of the fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance, when your perfectly free. - Rumi

Instead of an alien, remote, and uncontrollable technology run by a faraway technical elite, electricity could be an understandable neighborhood technology run by people you know. - Amory Lovins

Who knows why life unfolds the way it does.; why we share the way for a while or a day, then say goodbye. What matters most is to celebrate each moment of the journey. - Janet Crump

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew