

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## June 2007

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of JUNE 2007 Winter has settled in here so we decided to kick off the newly arrived season with a monster snowman building and ice fishing contest. Actually we're contemplating adding a new boat building course to our Events Calendar so that we can construct some vessels to get around town, as the early rains in Mastatal have been copious. The meteorological transition has been a bit smoother than that of the personnel with many short-termers and new interns taking place of our long-termers though BUCK, COURTNEY, GREG and NIC have been steadfast in keeping everything stable as she goes.

The new crew is undoubtedly finding their feet and the feeling around the Ranch has been very family-like as of late. For a short time we renamed our place *Rancho Revolution* as each day it seemed someone was coming up with a new way to make our operation more sustainable. Thanks to a book given to us by DESA VANLAARHOVEN and the Marion Institute, *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Ellix Katz, we have more containers than a Sealand cargo ship under our coffee counter filled with fermenting goodies such as pineapple vinegar, ginger beer, Kim chi, honey wine, ginger champagne (yes, you read that correctly), sourdough and more.

Our new-to-us yet old and reconditioned sewing machine has also been partially responsible for another transformation in the newly renovated textiles department as skirts, shirts, awnings, bags, aprons, Pico's bed and more fly off the outfeed table in a flurry of needles, thread and scrap fabric. PUKI and GREG spearheaded this movement with the rest of the crew cheering vigorously on the sidelines. Since then almost everyone has gotten in on the action. This recent rebellion against all things unsustainable began some months back when MAXINE took it into her own hands to rid the Ranch of its paraffin candle habit by replacing it with a dose of liquid palm oil luminescence. The beautiful red velvet colored candles have been the centerpiece of all of our glorious meals for many months now. A group from Lakeside School in Seattle presently graces our presence with BUCK and his students from UW-Tacoma soon to follow on their heels. We'll be bringing you updates on both these groups in future editions. The action's been steady and the ginger beer cold as we head into the heart of the rainy season. Enjoy the newsletter and let us know how you're doing when you get the chance.

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## Inspirational Impressions: Justice?

### **RM Program News: Evolving Gardens**

There have been a handful people going for the gusto in the gardens as of late. Menguante (the lunar planting cycle) has just ended and another slew of babies have reached adolescence and been thrown into the real world outside the nursery. Hopefully some of them will be going on their first dates soon and growing leaves where they didn't have them before. Thanks to KEYO for all of the seeds she started, they are totally enchanting passers-by into caring for our luscious, front yard Eden. MARIA, MICHAELA and LEN lead the creation of a massive terrace garden behind the main house. The carnage was out- of-control! HANNAH ripped out pounds of ginger from their homes, DANNY manhandled a mango tree and people were slashing bamboo roots left and right. Nothing survived. Slowly and with much sweat the battlefield transformed into the most inviting beds you've ever seen. Sheets of cardboard laden with soft grasses and supple manure nugs waited for the rain to tuck them in. It was so appealing that KATTIA's dog LOBO knelt in for a taste. He looked pleased. With a little time and heaps of rain the terraces will be ready. ARI has jumped into designing an orchard that you gaze out at from the Torre. And as you know plant life thrives here, including weeds, so the struggle continues. All in all, the gardens are looking hot thanks to the Ranch Troopers and their never-ending willingness to drop to their knees and get dirty!

BUCK

### **Conservation Update: The Ranch as the Ranch**

As our project and the community of Mastatal grow and evolve, conserving the Ranch's personality and character, that which has attracted so many through its gates this last half decade, becomes an ever bigger challenge. After trying for some time, we figured out that we can't be everything to everybody though we do believe that we can offer something to most people that find their way to the Ranch, be it inspiration, some tips on how to build with earth or make soap, or an opportunity for some self-growth.

The "feel" of the Ranch will undoubtedly continue to change as new structures are built and a greater diversity of people add their ideas, energy and soul to the Ranch's fabric. If we didn't change in any way ever, perhaps life at the Ranch would slowly grow a bit stagnant, something we certainly don't have to deal with in its current form. At its roots, the Ranch remains the same place it was on November 1, 2001, the first day that we pushed in those black gates and opened our doors to others. The beds might be a bit softer, and the food a bit better, but the Ranch is still the Ranch, and we hope to have you along for the entire ride.

### **Building Report: *El Ranchito***

With the final touches being added to the ranchito in the primary school this week, the building focus will now return to the Hankey House for one "final" push. The Hankey has been a virtual building site since its construction with continuously running improvement and modification projects. With the U of W group leaving in the next few days it has been decided that the final touches and last push should be made on the Hankey house so that the vols can sleep in a house matching the tranquility of the rest of the Ranch. The floor and cob will receive their final finishes, which will require a mass exodus from the house for at least a few days. The Panky/Crib/Cuña has had the roof attached *más o menos*, well *menos* the corners but with the floor laid it is really taking

shape. With the departure of CHRIS other people are now going to have to step up to the plate and take on some projects for this excellent hang out addition for the vols. As always there is still plenty of work to be done but maybe now we can finally move all those tools that have been housed in the Hankey for the last six months back to the bodega.

NIC

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Danny Boy**

"the vibrations around here are good."  
i kept saying,  
searching to...  
somehow communicate what i was feeling...  
seeing...  
thinking.

on the last day walking on the land,  
headed down the game trail through cloud jungle,  
enroute to the small roof which fended the rains  
from my tent...

i saw a band of small toucans.  
geeky and animalistic, they peered down at me,  
switchin from branch to branch,  
with reptilian eyes.

on the days preceding,  
i would sometimes walk in the full rain...  
in the cloud jungle,  
i was mostly always wet already.

all of us, between all of us...  
we maybe had one  
t-shirt that smelled fresh and clean.

i kept saying though, that  
"the vibrations 'round here are good."  
trying to understand the consistency of every meal  
pumped out of the small, enduring kitchen...  
i was there a week, how did every meal we ate look and  
taste so beautiful?

"the vibrations 'round here are good," i'd say what i  
was feeling...  
as a couple of us were tossing our shirts aside,  
while others jumped neatly into clear rivers and

waterfalls..

that came strong, and came swift,  
through the green lush woods.

i´ve never slacked and simultaneously worked so hard;  
been so productive, while enjoying so much...  
ever, in my life, i think.

i think i pushed it hard when i worked, but i pushed  
it even harder when we´d play frisbee.

walls were built by me, and others,  
and others before us,  
using sand, clay, straw,  
stomping feet, kneeding hands and cow shit.  
they were some of the most beautiful houses ever  
built.

asleep in bed, in the familiar warmth and dryness of  
your home, with rains cooing on the roof...  
you open your eyes, and the forest was your bedroom.  
it was totally awesome, that.  
aside from the occasional vampiric fucker of a  
horsefly, we didn´t much need the unused mosquito  
nets.

"the vibrations ´round here are good."  
the prevelent snakes and scorpions behaved themselves,  
mostly, and kept to their worlds.  
harmony.

work and rest,  
flow like the rain water  
down the strong cool rivers in the green lush woods.  
red clays and steep treed hills,  
along with the diversity that no one can imagine...  
or ever possibly comprehend.

the vibrations maybe...  
draw such an interesting crowd...  
up the (wider game trail) road,  
through the jungle, and through the hills...  
to the Rancho Mastatal.

i arrived with my sis on a rainy 5 o'clock.  
we took off our shoes, and saw a merry bunch,  
and baskets of fruits and vegetables in a corner.

it takes days to start...  
Start seeing, feeling, and understanding your  
connections with these people,  
who are not your average bears.

singers and players,  
people who can shave and shape wood,  
dig Earth, Share,  
and relocate stones.

i myself, moved a tree.  
digging its python roots free with my strength in  
meditation (feeling a bit contrary).  
with the efforts of a local young man and his sure  
strong strikes with his machete,  
a couple from england, and a girl living in canada  
pulling a lasso round the top of the tree,  
while i hardily pushed its trunk...  
only then did the tree come down,  
to clear space in the new herb garden, adjoining the  
new and larger kitchen under progress.

"progress." thats a funny one.  
"you're too progressive!" i said sarcastically to  
Robin, who was building her wall of cow shit faster  
and more skillful than any of us boys.

Tim, or Teem-O, rather...  
her partner, took me and Chris to the house all day  
long in basketball. Tim relieves my fears that getting  
older means my body will be less able.  
when i grow up,  
i want to have that much endurance...  
speed, and ass kick.

It is Tim and Robin's home, the Rancho Mastatal.  
how can i explain what they've done here...  
with their lives, the green Earth, the lives of  
others...  
how can i explain, when you can't explain dreams.

Len just said, "have you ever been anywhere like this?" and i said no before i retraced my steps through life, knowing i had never seen anything so smooth before.

(consistently smooth. like a road.  
what do roads do, where do they go?)

we lingered on an extra moment, trying to understand what we felt, but couldn't quite describe about the place.

there is utter chaos and complete order in perfect harmony, i guess you'd have to say.

and i don't like dabbling always in a world of fantasy. its sure, the dynamism of the Universe can change the mood and feel of life in a second. the Earth is capable of bounding from one edge of reality to the far side in just a moment- but i just kept smiling, and laughing, and smiling from one face to another: all so different, and for the time being, all our diverse characteristics and personalities made life so interesting, so full of hope, so effective.

why are we here?  
i think to see what we can do.

my rainbow flipflops broke, i used someone elses.

the ancient and long earned wisdoms of sustainability, agriculture, building beauty and comfort, in the respect and balance of the beautiful Earth...

In our post post modernized worlds of industrial and service based nations, where fossils burn long and hard and produce and create a havoc we find all too interesting and distracting, it seems funny that it took us thousands of years to learn to grow food, and in just a couple hundred we have forgotten all of that-

most incredible knowledge.

money doesn't grow on trees,  
it grows from the ground.

trees, and everything after that, they're the money.  
all the booty and bounty...  
reclaimed building materials,  
i'm sure paints and glues,  
and even beautiful jewelry come from seeds and husks  
fallen on the ground.

hunter, gathering.  
idle hands find arts,  
and then "elaborate" becomes a word in the dictionary.

i could probably keep writing, to explain more,  
trying to order out and edit the right words to build  
the right concepts to begin contextualizing what is  
actually possible out there in the world,  
in the woods.

but like Nic interposed, when we tried imagining what  
ants harmoniously think...  
"well...  
everyone else is carrying something..."

something useful down this road.

i, like the ants,  
feel the pull to help my friends with their efforts...  
here.

see you next time,  
space cowboy.

thanks to Nic, Tdogg, Len and Michela,  
April, Maria, Hannah, Rena, and Sunni,  
Courtney, Kassie, Buck, and Mello,  
the Uni kids from washington, Susan, and Chris the  
fish with a snorkel...  
Devon and Chris, my bro with the same birthday.

And especially to Tim and Robin,  
who live in a house...

who's house has shown me...  
aesthetics and rhythm...  
what i wait for one day.

and to gorgeous Mastatal...  
the name they use for the Earth,  
round here.

Daniel James

### **Community Facts/Stories: New Business Spring up in Town**

The Iguana Chocolate and Cabinas Siempre Verde, two of Mastatal's newest businesses owned by JUAN LUIS and family and MARCOS have stirred up a lot of interest in our environs as of late. Both organizations accept volunteers and offer lodging at their respective locations a la the Ranch. The increased gringo presence in town has certainly been noticeable, especially after hours at the pulpería, prompting an occasional angry comment from yours truly, but the fact that two new locally-owned and burgeoning enterprises have blossomed in town is something to celebrate. Juan Luis' farm/lodging business is spearheaded by the family's cacao plantation and chocolate production and has many of the Ranch volunteers experimenting with new ways to fulfill their sweet desires. Marcos' business is built on the foundation of his successful Spanish school and now local tours and volunteerism. Be sure to stop in and visit both operations on your next trip to Tropicise.

### **Comida Corner: Ginger Beer**

This non-alcoholic recipe, taken from *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Ellix Katz, has been smacking the lips of many since TIMO made the first batch a few months back with the vast amounts of ginger that we have been digging out of our gardens. Since harvesting the bumper crop we've been looking for ways to use up our bounty of ginger and recently came across this gem. This tangy drink is especially nice for those looking for an early afternoon sudsy beverage without having to crack to an Imperial (not that there's anything wrong with the latter). We almost abandoned the recipe even before making it for the first time after feeling a bit gypped by the powers that be that decided to call this soft-drink drink "beer". They must've been drunk coming up with that one. What were they thinking? Ginger beer depends on the creation of something called a "ginger bug". This starter can be used as yeast in any alcohol ferment or to start a sourdough. Ginger beer is fermented just enough to create carbonation but not enough to contribute any appreciate level of alcohol. Kids love it if made mild enough.

**Timeframe:** 2 to 3 weeks

#### **Ingredients:**

- 3 inches or more fresh gingerroot
- 2 cups sugar (we use *tapa dulce*)
- 2 lemons
- Water

**Process:**

1. Start the "ginger bug": Add 2 teaspoons grated ginger (skin and all) and 2 teaspoons sugar to 1 cup of water. Stir well and leave in a warm spot, covered with cheesecloth (we just use a plastic colander) to allow free circulation of air while keeping flies out. Add this amount of ginger and sugar every day or two and stir, until the bug starts bubbling, in two days to about a week.
2. Make the ginger beer any time after the bug becomes active. (If you wait more than a couple of days, keep feeding the bug fresh ginger and sugar every 2 days). Boil 2 quarts of water. Add about 2 inches of gingerroot, grated, for a mild ginger flavor (up to 6 inches for an intense ginger flavor) and 1½ cups sugar. Boil this mixture for about 15 minutes. Cool.
3. Once the ginger-sugar-water mixture has cooled, strain the ginger out and add the juice of the lemons and the strained ginger bug. (If you intend to make this process an ongoing rhythm, reserve a few tablespoons of the active bug as a starter and replenish it with additional water, grated ginger, and sugar). Add enough water to make 1 gallon.
4. Bottle in sealable bottles: recycle plastic soda bottles with screw tops; rubber gasket "bail-top" bottles that Grolsch and some other premium beers use; sealable juice jugs; or capped beer bottles. Leave bottles to ferment in a warm spot for about 2 weeks.
5. Cool before opening. When you open ginger beer, be prepared with a glass, since carbonation can be strong and force liquid rushing out of the bottle.

## *Salud*

### **F?tbol Follies: Winter Ball**

With June looking as though it is going to be as wet as May fútbol has now been moved indoors to the salón. Playing on an even surface completely changes the game and actually allows for some composure on the ball, which before on a bumpy pitch was only risked if there was nobody near you, as you could never quite predict how the ball would roll or bounce! Despite all the rain we've managed to squeeze in a mini tournament and a double-header over the last few weeks, both in San Vicente. Some weeks back the win against La Fila left its mark on the whole team, quite literally, and after some Saturday night festivities the prospect of another game on Sunday really didn't seem that appealing. As we nursed our bruises and knocks from the game against La Fila, the rain started early and our already waning enthusiasm started to drop to new lows. Arriving at San Vicente we discovered there were several other teams that had turned up including La Palma, Zapatón and San Vicente. Unfortunately this led to the decision of playing more games but with shorter halves, only 20 minutes each half (enthusiasm still falling). As the rain lashed the quagmire of a pitch we took solace in the shelter of the *comedor*.

Unfortunately it appeared that our enthusiasm wasn't the only thing being dampened by the rain as about halfway through the first game the roof decided that enough was enough, much to the shock and surprise of everyone sitting under it. Fortunately no one was too badly injured and the rusted pieces of tin roof were replaced by a much safer yet leakier canvas alternative! As Los Galácticos took the pitch for our first game against La Palma the rather bizarre decision to put MINOR in goal and leave GREVIN on the bench was made. This is what happens when ALEX is unable to attend the match and CARACA is left in charge! In extremely difficult and slippery conditions Minor performed admirably in goal and although technically La Palma's winning goal was his fault in those conditions even the most accomplished of goalkeepers would have struggled to gather the

ball cleanly. Despite us taking a rather undeserved lead La Palma, who were clearly the better team on the day, came back to win the game 2-1. Trudging off the pitch we were promised another game and wishing to make amends for our earlier defeat we waited around for a few hours for our game.

The second game was not to be and we headed back to Mastatal dejected, defeated and thoroughly sodden! After the highs of Saturday we really should have bowed out on a high, as Sir Alex Ferguson should have after the treble season of 1999. But this isn't Manchester and we are Los Galácticos not the Red Devils and so a few weeks later we again made our way to San Vicente for two games, the first against a team from San Antonio de Tulín and the second versus the hosts, San Vicente. In the first match, Tulín struck first on a direct kick. It took until the second half for los amarillos to tie things up with TIMO picking up a garbage goal off a corner kick deflection. They all count the same I guess. Twenty minutes later ALEX weaved his way through the Tulín defense and slid a beautiful shot past the goalie's short side to take the lead. Mastatal's defense did the rest with the first game ending in a 2-1 Galáctico victory. Mastatal faired equally well in the second game with JORGE and ALEX collecting the two goals that would propel our team to the day's second victory. Things are looking up on the fútbol front in Mastatal with many attesting the improved play to nightly games in the community center.

JUNIOR, ALEX and TIMO have also been playing in a local *campeonato* with the team from Guarumal. *Los verdes* have performed extremely well in the in the first dozen games holding onto second place heading into the homestretch. The top four out of nine teams will advance to the knockout round and for now, Guarumal is well-positioned to be there for the semis.

That's all for now. Thanks for your continued interest in our footballing. They'll be more to report soon.

### **Inspirational Impressions: Justice?**

"How could a just and loving God put so many nutrients in vegetables and none in tequila?"

--- Tom Robbins

*Abrazos,*

The Ranch Crew