

Still Life

The setting inspires at Maui's Hui No'eau Visual Arts Center

Story and photo by [Bonnie Friedman](#)

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The lacy canopy of a monkeypod tree is a natural draw at the Hui No'eau Visual Arts Center in Makawao.

I'm standing under a squat monkeypod tree on a sunny, soft-breeze Maui morning. It's the shortest of three, but it has the biggest canopy of branches. They form an ethereal and peaceful shelter.

At the Hui No'eau Visual Arts Center in Makawao, I've always gone directly to the art. But today, this city girl is here for the nature, and although I've been here many times, how is it possible that I'd never noticed these trees until now?

"This is one of my favorite spots on the property," says Lana Coryell, the arts center's Maui-born-and-raised programs and communications coordinator and my knowledgeable guide for the day.

The sprawling, 25-acre estate known as Kaluanui has been home to "the Hui" since 1934, when Ethel Baldwin, who, Coryell says, "was super-passionate about the arts," founded the organization. The historic home, built in 1917 by celebrated territorial-era architect C.W. Dickey, houses administrative offices; a gift shop that sells handmade items crafted by Hui members; a gallery that shows up to eight exhibits annually; and a history room that displays, among many other things, Baldwin's magnificent collection of silver-plated copper hollowware (bowls, cups, and vases). Coryell mentions that Baldwin had crafted it herself. I must have admired it a hundred times, and now I've learned something astonishing and new about it.

We walk across the great lawn up to the sculpture garden. "You can still see some of the remains of the old mill from when this was a sugar plantation in the 1850s," she explains. "A lot of the art here is carved from trees that had to be removed."

We stop at a tree that remains. "This is 'uki'uki," she says. "Ancient Hawaiians used the berries to make indigo-colored dye for kapa. Hula dancers still use them to dye their costumes."

As we stroll, Coryell points out native botanicals—‘akia, ‘ahinahina, ‘ihi, and kulu‘i; transplants—Italian cypress, plumeria, date palm, kukui nut, shell ginger, and red, green, and variegated ti; and a veritable fruit salad—mango, lychee, orange, and banana.

“It really is like a park,” she says. “We encourage people to use it, to have picnics. Folks come to fly kites, to do yoga. We love that. And it’s all free, including the exhibits.”

I hear little voices coming from the Tiny Hands studio, where, Coryell explains, kids can start when they’re just 2. “I took my first class here when I was 5,” she says, “and somewhere there are photos to prove it!”

As we approach the Open Studio, I ask Coryell about that program. “After artists have successfully completed classes or met some Hui requirements, we provide a state-of-the-art space for them to work on their own. Our ceramics and jewelry studios are solar powered and represent the Hui’s move to a greener future. This adjacent outside area is devoted to native tree plantings—so far, we’ve put in koa and ‘ohi‘a.”

I love the estate’s old outbuildings. Ceramics are glazed and fired in the former stables. What used to be the dairy is now Hawai‘i’s only publicly accessible photography darkroom. Behind it, a charming cottage houses visiting artists and artists in residence. It’s backed by lemon eucalyptus, guava, and banana trees—a true tropical paradise. To me, the most beautifully repurposed space is the former carriage house, now the well-equipped printmaking studio. I resolve to take a class in this building very soon.

Not always the most observant person, I’m glad I’ve kept my eyes wide open. I point out a “dinosaur head” made of scrap lumber in the crook of a tree that Coryell hadn’t noticed before. I’m not the only one to learn something new about the Hui today.

Do

Visiting the [Hui No‘eau Visual Arts Center](#) to see the current exhibition and history room is free. Bring a picnic and relax. A guided, one-hour walking tour is \$12; spend \$6 on “Kaluanui: Plants at the Hui” for a self-guided tour. *2841 Baldwin Avenue, Makawao. 1-808-572-6560.*

Stay

In Hawaiian, its name means “home expressing hospitality,” and that’s what you’ll find at the charming [Hale Ho‘okipa Inn](#). Built in 1924, it’s on both the national and Hawai‘i registers of historic places. From here, it’s a quick walk to Makawao’s great shopping and dining. Rates start at \$135. *1-808-572-6698.* The pastoral [Banyan Bed & Breakfast](#) is a collection of plantation-style cottages and one large house that’s perfect for groups of friends or extended families. Rates start at \$155. *1-808-572-9021.*

Eat

For a farm-to-table breakfast or lunch, no place in town does it better than [Market Fresh Bistro](#), where every egg dish is outstanding. *1-808-572-4877.* Pick up provisions for a picnic at Rodeo General Store. *1-808-572-1868.* Stay Upcountry for dinner—a salad, pizza, and glass of wine at [Casanova Italian Restaurant and Deli](#) will make the day complete. *1-808-572-0220.*

Free Maui, the Valley Isle maps are available at the [AAA Hawai‘i branch](#). For free [TourBook](#) information and [TripTik](#) routings, visit the [branch](#) or visit the [Explore Travel section](#) of our website.