

Green walls' inventor offers advice on helping them thrive



One of Patrick Blanc's vertical gardens can be seen at CaixaForum Madrid, a museum in Spain. Photo: Cecilia/Flickr

Vertical gardens may seem ubiquitous now, especially in small urban spaces where designers want to incorporate greenery, but they do have a creator and he says some people are missing the point.

Patrick Blanc, a scientist for the French National Center for Scientific Research, is the inventor of the vertical garden and his work can be found across the globe, from the Marithe + Francois Girbaud boutique in Manhattan to One Central Park in Sydney, Australia.

Blanc has been experimenting with plant walls since he was 12, fascinated with plants that can thrive in unlikely places.

As his work began to receive more and more publicity, so did the concept of the vertical garden. Now there are many different variations of his idea out there, but Blanc notes some of these vertical gardens are not reaching their full potential.

Common mistakes such as choosing the wrong species or having too few varieties can undermine the health and stability of the installation. Even when the right **plants** are installed, providing proper care is essential to a green wall's success over time.

“People tell me ‘Yes, verticals gardens are beautiful, but after one year everything is dead,’” Blanc told The Straits Times. “You’ve got to know plants and their habits, which ones you can prune and when to prune. Plants need to grow in harmony. Vertical gardens can be built to last for many years.”

When Blanc designs his vertical gardens, they are like works of art. He even copyrights them so the layout cannot be reproduced for financial gain or public acclaim.

“If a wall is going to be seen from up close, I pay attention to the texture and form of the leaves; from a distance, the colors must be considered,” he told The New York Times. “I’m sensitive to the architecture of leaves. I use plants with curves.”

Blanc’s goal with the vertical garden is to reintegrate nature in spaces where it is unexpected. He feels people are more sensitive to plant life when they discover it in unusual locations.

He doesn’t think designers should add a disproportionate number of living walls just because they can.

“After all, a city should look like a city,” Blanc said. “It’s about creating **green spaces** that match beautiful modern architecture. The balance is important.”