

In southeast Paris, on a street just beyond the Boulevard Périphérique ring road, an unassuming red door opens to a secret tropical oasis. Part domestic residence, part wild ecological laboratory, this building is home to the couple Patrick Blanc and Pascal Héni, as well as 1,500 species of plants, thousands of fish, many birds, lizards, tropical frogs and a small Central American turtle.



PATRICK

PASCAL



BIENVENUE! Patrick and Pascal in the courtyard of their home

at home with patrick blanc and pascal of bolly- wood

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WATER BOY LUKE TUDOR GRIFFITHS

PARIS, FRANCE — The green-fingered architect behind this Parisian paradise is Patrick Blanc, a botanist specialising in plants from tropical forests. Patrick — who has bright green hair and long fingernails, ideal for taking leaf cuttings — has worked for the French National Centre for Scientific Research since 1982, but is most famous for popularising the “vertical garden”. His phenomenal living tapestries appear on the walls of buildings in cities around the world. You can spot them in London and Sydney, Hong Kong and Miami. Sometimes composed of many thousands of diverse plant species, and covering many hundreds of square metres, these extraordinary green walls require no soil and little maintenance.

Pascal Héni, Patrick’s partner of 33 years, is a singer most renowned as “Pascal of Bollywood”. Having begun his career singing traditional French songs, Pascal fell head-over-heels for Indian cinema in the late 1980s and was later inspired to record an album of the genre’s classic hits. His homage earned him superstar status in India, leading to a countrywide tour and even a TV show. He continues to write and perform songs, and accompanies Patrick on his many field trips around the world.

The couple’s Paris home reflects their loving, adventurous life together. Surfaces are covered with souvenirs — fruit husks; wood carvings and other exotic trinkets; framed photographs of the pair over the years. Surprises are everywhere, from a sauna room that houses a sizeable population of fluorescent frogs to the hanging vines that must be drawn back like beaded curtains to enter a new room (the house has few real doors).

The pièce de résistance of this green wonderland is the extraordinary double-height living room and office. A magnificent vertical garden stretches from floor to ceiling across two walls, with birds nesting in its highest layers. At its base, a glass walkway is actually a giant aquarium, filled with 21,000 litres of water and a couple thousand of fish.

In these pages Patrick gives Accent a tour...

We bought the house ten years ago and moved in a year later on my birthday — June 3, 2009. Many houses on the street are similar; they were built as small metalwork factories. Our house was bought by a creative in the 1970s who made all the structural modifications to change it from a factory to a house. We didn't need to make any architectural changes — our changes were in everything concerning the plants and water.



I loved plants since I was very young. I grew up in Suresnes, close to Bois de Boulogne, in the suburbs of Paris. We lived in an apartment and I had plants on the desk in my bedroom. When I came up with the idea of vertical gardens, at 12 years old, I wanted to have a biological filter for my aquarium, but I also wanted to create more space for plants. With a vertical garden on the wall I could have many more plants than I could fit on my desk. As a student I needed some room to work, so it was limited. That was my very first vertical garden.



POWER POSE! Patrick sporting one of his many botanical numbers

It's actually very easy to maintain an ecosystem in your home. We travel a lot and we are not very often in the house. Every few days some people come in to give food to the birds, because they are warm-blooded and need a lot of food. The plants, frogs, lizards, fish and the turtle need absolutely nothing. Even if you left the fish for three or four weeks without food they would survive, although of course they wouldn't be too healthy.

When we are at home we like to start the day about 8 or 9am with champagne. Then we move on to rosé wine. We often go out to restaurants or to see friends, but we spend so little time at home that mostly we like to stay among the plants and the birds and have a glass of champagne together.



We have a small turtle, a breed native to Central America and some parts of the southern United States. I bought her as a baby years before we came here, so she is about 14 or 15 years old. She's a very good guy because she only eats the dead fish. Also she never cuts the leaves of the plants in the water or goes after the frogs.

Beneath my office desk is a giant aquarium that you can walk on. It's a huge thing, about 6x7m and 50cm deep — containing 21,000 litres of water. It's a natural recycling system.

I think there are something like 2,000 fish in the aquarium. They range in size between 3-4cm to 30cm. But even the biggest, the leporinus, aren't aggressive. They don't eat the smaller fish. At first we had a problem with algae affecting the aquarium's transparency. It's very important to have the glass touching the water, but when this happens it means that algae can develop, which affected the transparency. So after a while I introduced some fish who could suck the glass clean. For six or seven years I haven't had to clean it myself, the fish do all the work.



SANTÉ YOU STAY Patrick and Pascal enjoy a glass of rosé

I have many books on plants in our library, some old, some new. I love seeing the plants in the vertical garden moving in the direction of the books, which were once made from plants and tree trunks themselves. I like the idea of the living plants touching the dead plants. It's the best way to forget that you have to kill a plant to make a book.



I travel a lot for work and also with Pascal. I always have to change my passport — in the past 14 months I've travelled to 32 countries. Last summer we travelled to Malawi and Zambia to look at the fish. In the aquarium we have many fish from Lake Malawi and Lake Tanganyika, but I had never visited in the right season to see them. It was fantastic to see these fish that I had been raising since I was a teenager in their natural habitat.



QUELLE HUSK! Patrick examines a souvenir from his travels



This is supposed to be the true chair from the [soft porn] movie *Emmanuelle*. We bought it in the flea market in Paris and it came with a certificate of guarantee saying that it was from the film. I liked the movie because it was set in Thailand in the period when it was not so easy to travel, and around the time I had first visited Thailand and Malaysia. Nowadays we almost never go to the cinema, but we often watch classical movies like *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* and *Sunset Boulevard*. When you have 100 years of cinema behind you, you can choose to see the best.



O COME, O COME EMMANUELLE
The couple with the famed chair



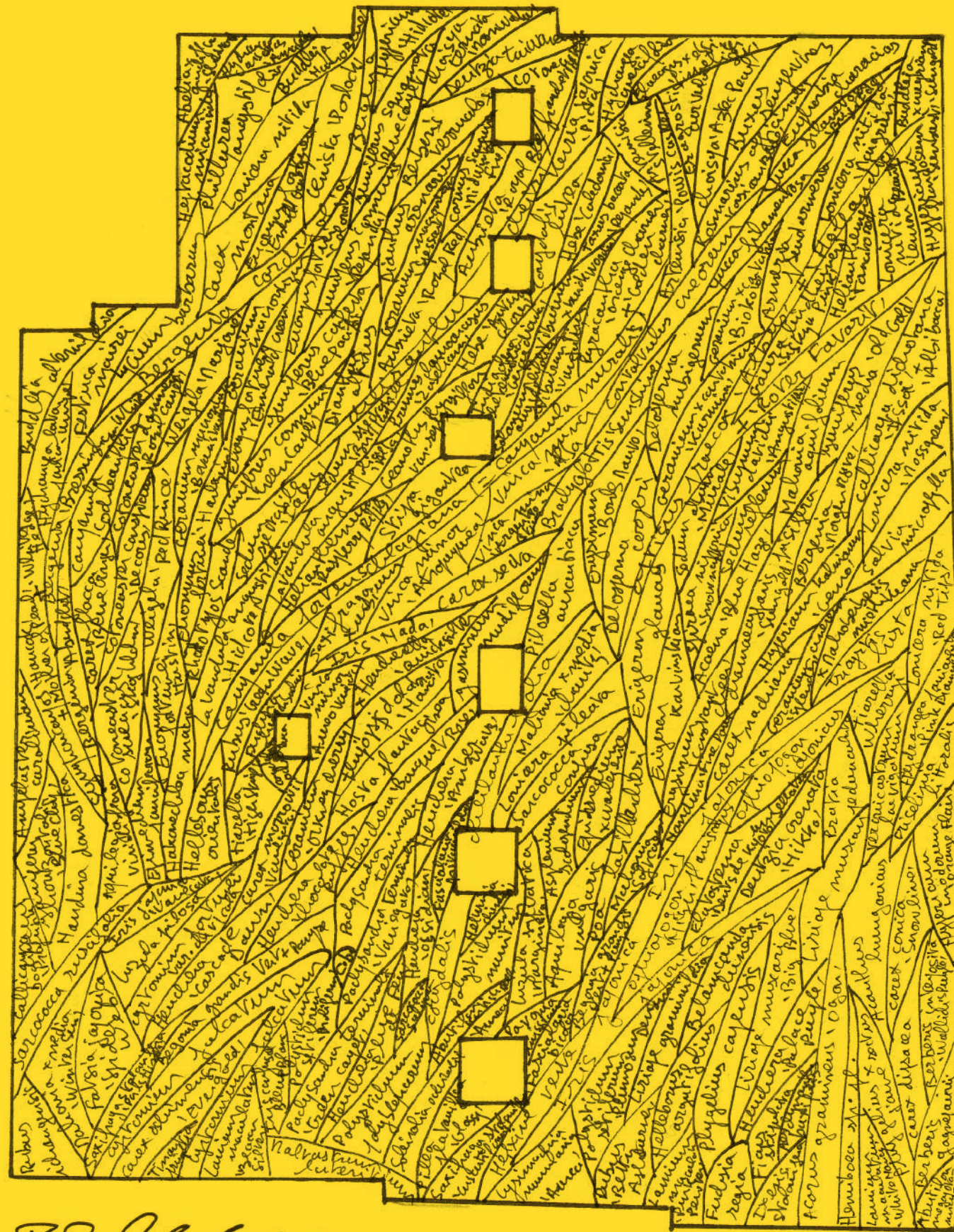
I met Pascal in a bar where it was possible to go up and sing. There was a man playing piano and you came up with your songbook. So I was singing a little bit of Zarah Leander and Pascal sang a lot of other songs, especially Michel Jonasz. We didn't see each other again for a long time after that, but suddenly three years later we started speaking again one day and we came home together. From that day we never quit each other. That was 33 years ago, in 1985.

I always shower outside. Today it's very cold in Paris, -5C, and when I look at my plants in the bathroom there is ice on the tips of the leaves. But the water is hot, so it's no problem at all. It's the same in Japan when I go to the hot outdoor baths in winter.



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LE MIRAGE VERT - Rue d'Aboukir - PARIS



P. Bleu
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The only thing involved in making a vertical garden is a love for plants. And by loving them I mean knowing them. You need to know which plant is shade-loving, which one is sun-loving, whether a plant will develop a lot or stay the same year after year. Beyond the growth habits of the plants, everything else is very simple.

The only thing that plants need is light, water and some minerals. Even the shade-loving plants require some light — and our modern apartments can be more like caves. We live protected by walls in the same way as our troglodyte ancestors did. So you may need to add some artificial light, which is easy. Otherwise you have to give them water and some minerals, but not a lot. It's not difficult.

I was 12 when I began making these vertical gardens and nobody explained to me how it would work, so I learnt by myself. The problem is that now everybody wants everything immediately. But life doesn't work like that. It's not the internet, it's not Amazon. You have to look at the living thing and spend time with it. You have to take lessons from your successes and failures. Life is a very long wait.

VERT WE GO! Patrick's vertical garden, Oasis of Aboukir, in belle Paris

