

PATRICK BLANC

THE HINDU, Friday, February 27, 2004 FR-3

Going green...enviably

French Embassy in New Delhi saw vertical garden in its main hall courtesy Dominique Girard, Ambassador of France in India and Patrick Blanc, botanist-cum-landscapist from Paris. RANA SIDDIQUI reports.

IMAGINE A huge pillar or wall almost as high. Or Delhi skyline with several small pockets into it and inside each of those small pockets, small plants, green and ornamental which will grow as tall as the wall itself with the passage of time. Well, this picture of imagination was just transformed into reality at the Main Hall of the French Embassy in New Delhi by Patrick Blanc, Director of research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, laboratory of tropical Biology, Paris.

Each wall, around 20 feet high, is now studded with green tropical plants. Stand near it, and you will feel as if some artificial plants are pasted on the wall. You might even feel a droplet or two topple on your head from above. A close scrutiny discloses that the wall has small, dark brown pockets, as ones in your coat, almost invisible from even a small distance. Tiny leafy plants peep out of these pockets, mix into other plants forming a shade over these pockets and "the energy grass" that plants grow on. You may feel surprised, that the wall that bears the load of these vertical plants does not get soggy or receive cracks. It is because Blanc has fixed one centimetre thick synthetic, metallic frame on which he grows the energy grass, inserts pockets and roots plants inside them.

These plants do not need soil but only need minerals to grow. But they do need sunlight for which some opening at the top is being made allowing sunrays to fall

justifiably. The water containing mineral is fed to the plants through a pipe.

"These are system plants, they can grow on micronutrients that are mixed in the water. I can even make a canopy after it grows from above. The places where sunshine is lacking and soil cover is thin this vertical cultivation may prove to be a boom," enlightens Blanc who chose Delhi's nurseries and Assam for the exercise, and brought around 70 species of foliage plants that number up to 3000 for the embassy. Varieties of ficus, tradescantia, begonia spathiphyllum, monstera and some ferns have been used.

This is Blanc's first project in India that Ambassador of France to India Dominique Girard has granted green signal to. Blanc, who got a copyright on the vertical garden 10 years ago, has to his credit several international projects such as Foundation Cartier in Paris, Museum for Contemporary Art at Kanazawa in Japan, a 30-meter high wall at Hotel Pershing in Paris and many more. He is now building a museum of primitive art in Paris that will be operational by this year.

Dressed in a green shirt, which has a few designs of plants in white, a very agile 50-year-old Blanc seems very happy. "I bought this shirt from Janpath today and wanted to colour my hair green but had no time," he chuckles.