

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a colorful, patterned skirt, is sitting on a green armchair. She is leaning back with her hand on her chin, looking towards the camera. The background is a dense wall of various green plants, including ferns and large-leafed foliage. The floor is a light-colored, patterned tile.

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Talk of the South

Your Monthly Guide to Southern Culture

In the Garden

Wonder Wall

Laura Vinroot Poole brings the colossal work of French botanist Patrick Blanc to life in Charlotte, North Carolina

by JOHANNA LENANDER



EACH MORNING, WHEN Laura Vinroot Poole steps over the threshold of her Charlotte boutique Capitol, the first order of business isn't returning phone calls or inspecting the latest arrivals of couture gowns and fine jewelry. Instead, she takes in the scenery—specifically the two-story vertical garden by renowned French landscape designer Patrick Blanc that anchors the courtyard of the store. "It feels like a friend," she says. "It makes me happy every morning when I see it. I have never felt like that about a garden before."

Vinroot Poole, the daughter of former Charlotte mayor Richard Vinroot, continues to attract attention from the New York-centric fashion world for delivering one-of-a-kind designs and international style to North Carolina. Bringing Blanc's work to Capitol is yet another example. "People come driving from out of town to visit it," she says.

She first became acquainted with pieces by Blanc—whose green thumb has touched some of the world's chicest museums, hotels, and shops—during buying trips to Paris, when she would spend downtime admiring his verdant walls in the atrium of the Pershing Hall Hotel, which features 115 perpendicular feet of Blanc botany. "It was always my favorite place," she says. "The wall was mesmerizing." Then, as chance would have it, Vinroot Poole met the eccentric artist at a party in India in 2007.

Blanc recalls his enthusiasm when Vinroot Poole and her husband, the architect Perry Poole, approached him just a few weeks after the party about creating a garden mural for Capitol, which they were in the process of building. "I was very excited to do the



Green Piece Clockwise from top left: A second-story view of Blanc's wall; Laura Vinroot Poole and her husband, Perry Poole; looking out at the wall from inside the shop.



"I was very excited to do the project because the biology is incredible in the South," Blanc says

project because the biology is incredible in the South," Blanc says. "I was able to work with species that hadn't been available to me before." But no one was more enthusiastic about the collaboration than Vinroot Poole. "I was so flattered that he agreed to do a project in my hometown and so proud that we were able to build it for Charlotte," she says.

The final design arrived state-side in the form of a framed drawing that included combinations of Southern plants such as heuchera and salvia, which typically grow in vertical conditions such as cliffs or slopes. The combination was classic Blanc, who only works with indigenous species that will thrive in their natural environment.

But since Blanc didn't participate in the actual construction in North Carolina, Poole worked alongside the botanist's team to figure out the installation process. "The most important part is the irrigation," he says. "And I was lucky enough to find a great plumber who worked out an efficient sys-

tem." The plants are mounted on an organic felt fabric attached to two layers of fiberglass, which in turn are attached to a steel grid supported by a stucco wall.

The maintenance of the mural is laissez-faire, with biannual visits from a landscaping firm and minimal interference with the natural life of the foliage. "At first I was disappointed when some of the plants wilted on the bottom, and I wanted to replace them," Poole says. "But Laura convinced me to wait to see if they would spring back to life. Which they did. I have learned that it's a beautiful cycle." ©

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