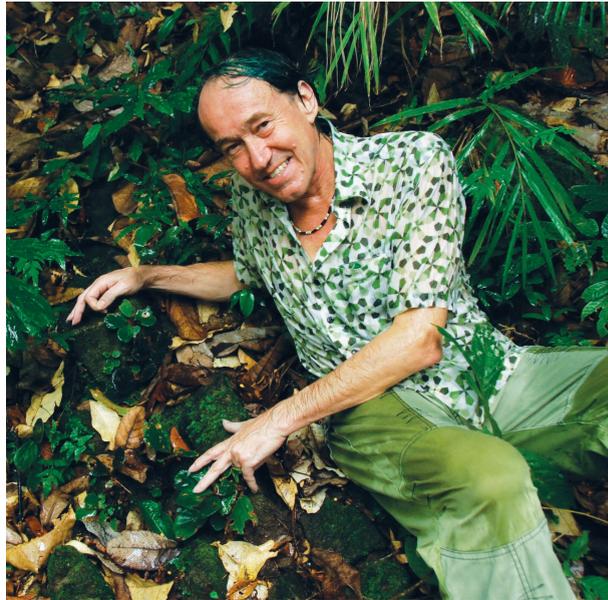


Patrick Blanc

The botanist and vertical garden pioneer tells Anne de Verteuil where he first found inspiration



“YOU CAN’T STUDY PLANTS IN ISOLATION, YOU NEED TO LOOK AT THE LONG STORY OF THE PLACES”

What was your first recollection of being outside in a garden or wild space?

Going to the Jardin Exotique in Monte Carlo with my parents when I was seven or eight years old. I remember being most impressed at seeing cacti and succulents growing on this vertical cliff garden. Also walks to visit the waterfalls in the Bois de Boulogne, close to where we lived.

What aspects of your past have influenced your present?

Everything I remember from when I was young is connected to nature. But as a child I also loved Edith Piaf and I saw her sing in 1962 when I was nine years old. These two things are important to me.

What objects sum up the way you look at the world?

Notebook, pencil and camera.

What’s on your mood board?

I have a huge glass-covered aquarium with a collection of *Cryptocoryne*, a genus of aquatic plants that grow in Borneo. This plant is part of the reason I do what I do today. As a child, this plant

was magical to me and when I first bought one in an aquarium shop, it fascinated me that the leaves were covered in mud from the river, where they were growing only two weeks before. I still love them and bought one only last week in Singapore.

What or who has been your most unexpected source of inspiration?

The first time I went to Malaysia and Thailand, when I was 19, it was a revelation to find plants growing in mosses on rocks and walls. It meant that they had a continuous layer of substrate for the roots and the freedom to spread indefinitely, unlike plants growing on branches. This was a very important discovery for my work with vertical gardens.

What has caused your sharpest learning curve?

Studying for my PhD, my professor, Prof Schnell, was very influential. I learned the global aspect of world vegetation from him. He taught me that you can’t study plants in isolation, you need to look at the long story of the places they come from. This global vision of the plant world was very important to me. Before that, I loved plants, but when you understand a bit more, you love more.

What has been the high point of your life so far, and the low point?

Seeing Edith Piaf sing when I was nine – this was a most exceptional thing. When you love the evolution of life, what could be low?

Which one book would you pass on to your grandchildren – or your students?

Alain Robbe-Grillet’s books – I like his work, because nothing in it is logical, it is a succession of uncorrelated moments and repetitions and, of course, life is a succession of repetitions.

If you were left to wander for eternity in one garden or space, where would it be?

Very close to a small stream deep in a rainforest in Borneo, close to my dear *Cryptocoryne*.

Why will we remember you?

Maybe because I have long nails or green hair! Or because I tried to show to the world that concrete isn’t in opposition to biodiversity, and because I tried to explore biodiversity in towns and on concrete walls.

www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com