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GREEN WALL PIONEER PATRICK BLANC: "NOW EVERYBODY IS DOING VERTICAL GARDENS"

Dezeen and MINI World Tour: in this exclusive interview with vertical gardens pioneer Patrick Blanc, the French botanist discusses his hanging gardens for Herzog & de Meuron's new Pérez Art Museum in Miami and reflects on why vertical gardens have become so popular.



The new Pérez Art Museum Miami by Herzog & de Meuron, which opened last month, features clusters of columns covered with plants suspended from the building's large overhanging roof



Blanc explains that the Swiss architects approached him to create these vertical gardens after they successfully worked together on the CaixaForum arts centre in Madrid, completed in 2008.



"We had already covered a wall totally with plants in Madrid," says Blanc. "Here, for the museum, they asked me: 'Do you think it's possible to have the plants on columns instead?' I said: 'Yes, of course.'"



Unlike a green wall, which faces in one direction, Blanc had to use different types of plants on each side of the hanging columns.

"For the outside surface, facing the sea, [the plants] have to face full sun, they have to face strong winds, sometimes salt and sometimes hurricanes," he says. "The side facing the museum is very dark, so [I used] shade-loving plants."



Blanc claims the key to creating a successful vertical garden is the diversity of species used.

"I use many, many different species," he explains. "Here, in Miami, I used 80 different species. Sometimes, I use up to 400. When you have so many species, it looks much more natural."



Vertical gardens are more than just aesthetically pleasing, Blanc goes on to claim.

"Because the roots are growing on the surface, [rather than into the ground], all of the micro-organisms associated with the roots are totally in contact with the air, [which is important] for de-pollution," he says, "Also, you have benefits of insulation."



He continues: "And, of course, the target is to use water collected from the roof. With a horizontal garden you lose a lot of water through percolation in the soil. You only have useful water when you have a vertical garden."

Blanc believes that vertical gardens have become so popular because they provide an interesting and space-efficient way of introducing greenery into cities and claims he doesn't mind that so many other people have taken on his idea.



"You use vertical space and usually it is empty space," he says. "I think that is why they have been such a big success." "Everybody in the world is doing vertical gardens. Of course, 20-25 years ago, I was the only one. But I am happy because with this idea I created a new vision of the interaction between human beings, the town and plants."



Patrick Blanc. Copyright: Dezeen