

Patrick Blanc: The Hanging Gardens Of Paris

Eccentric botanist Patrick Blanc has made himself into a floral folk hero, thanks to his fanciful vertical gardens. Designed to bring nature to otherwise unused spaces of the city, these self-sustaining installations are becoming increasingly popular both in Paris and around the world.



Patrick Blanc among the shiny leaves and a small white flower of the rare *Paraboea vulpina* covering a deeply shaded vertical limestone cliff, Perak, Malaysia, June 2015 | Copyright Pascal Heni

Usually dressed in green, with green hair and a green thumb (literally), Patrick Blanc is part-scientist, part-landscape architect. Having become hooked on botany as a teen, he combined a passion for botanical science with an artistic vision. He had seen orchids growing off the trunks of trees, and other species growing off rocks and cliffs, and realized that plants did not need to be limited to growing only in soil. Armed with an encyclopedic knowledge of flora and its growing habits, he set out to create living masterpieces using simple, repeatable methods.

Blanc's incredible designs are thanks to his own patented technology (the 'Mur Végétal'), enabling plants to be grown without any earth. Unlike the plants themselves, the 'soil' in which they grow is neither natural nor biodegradable. Blanc uses a combination of PVC and polyamide felt, which are capable of supporting many plants' root structures easily. Whereas soil would erode or simply fall off – damaging the building on which it sits – Blanc's device should last for hundreds of years.

Blanc chooses his plants very carefully, leaning on his vast botanical knowledge and his work at the French National Centre for Scientific Research. While much of the theory seems quite simple (plants that prefer shade at the bottom; plants that like direct sunlight at the top), his success is hard to replicate (Wall Street Journal): 'I know all the different plants. It takes other people a lot longer to do what I do and even then they don't necessarily achieve a good result.' One key to the process is to embrace diversity. When hundreds of species are utilized, insects and other pests struggle to take hold.

Patrick Blanc's innovation has seen him complete projects all over the world, including erected the tallest vertical garden in the world in Sydney, Australia. Luckily, Blanc is French, and there are plenty of vertical gardens to be found all over Paris.



Musée du Quai Branly, Façade verre, Mur végétal, immeuble Haussmannien et Tour Eiffel, May 2012 | ©Patrick Blanc

Musée du Quai Branly

Tourists to Paris are likely to have seen the vertical garden on the façade of the Musée du Quai Branly, near the Eiffel Tower. The museum itself is dedicated to the study of different human cultures, and yet the exterior gives the impression that this might be a museum of natural history and biology. However, this is very much a man-made garden, an example of humanity's desire to have control over nature. Or, it's an illustration of nature taking back its place in the urban world. Or, it's neither. Whatever it is, it's stunning! There are 150 species growing on the walls of the museum, with 15,000 individual plants. 'Wallflowers, ferns, fuchsias, irises, heuchera and willows set their roots down into it and absorb the nutrient-enriched water that circulates there.' The wall was completed in 2005, and only needs to be pruned once a year!

Musee du Quai Branly, 37 Quai Branly, 75007, Paris



Hotel Pershing Hall, Paris | ©Patrick Blanc

Pershing Hall Hotel

Pershing Hall is a glamorous five-star hotel, so-named because it was the headquarters for American General John Pershing during World War I. Just off the Champs-Élysées, near the flagship Nike and Disney stores, this is proper Parisian elegance. It is fitting, then, that the indoor patio area (with open ceiling) houses an exclusive 30-meter garden wall. The first of Patrick Blanc's truly large vertical gardens, this one is, supposedly, his favorite. 'This is his best place in Paris,' claims the PR manager at the hotel, 'he chooses to show people this place' (House and Leisure). Unlike many of his other works, this one can be enjoyed over breakfast at the hotel restaurant, or late at night in the cocktail lounge. The colors of the lights change throughout the day, lending a surreal ambience, especially in the evenings. The hotel

is pricey, naturally, but it does have a certain botanical charm that few others can compete with.

Pershing Hall, 49 Rue Pierre Charron, 75008, Paris



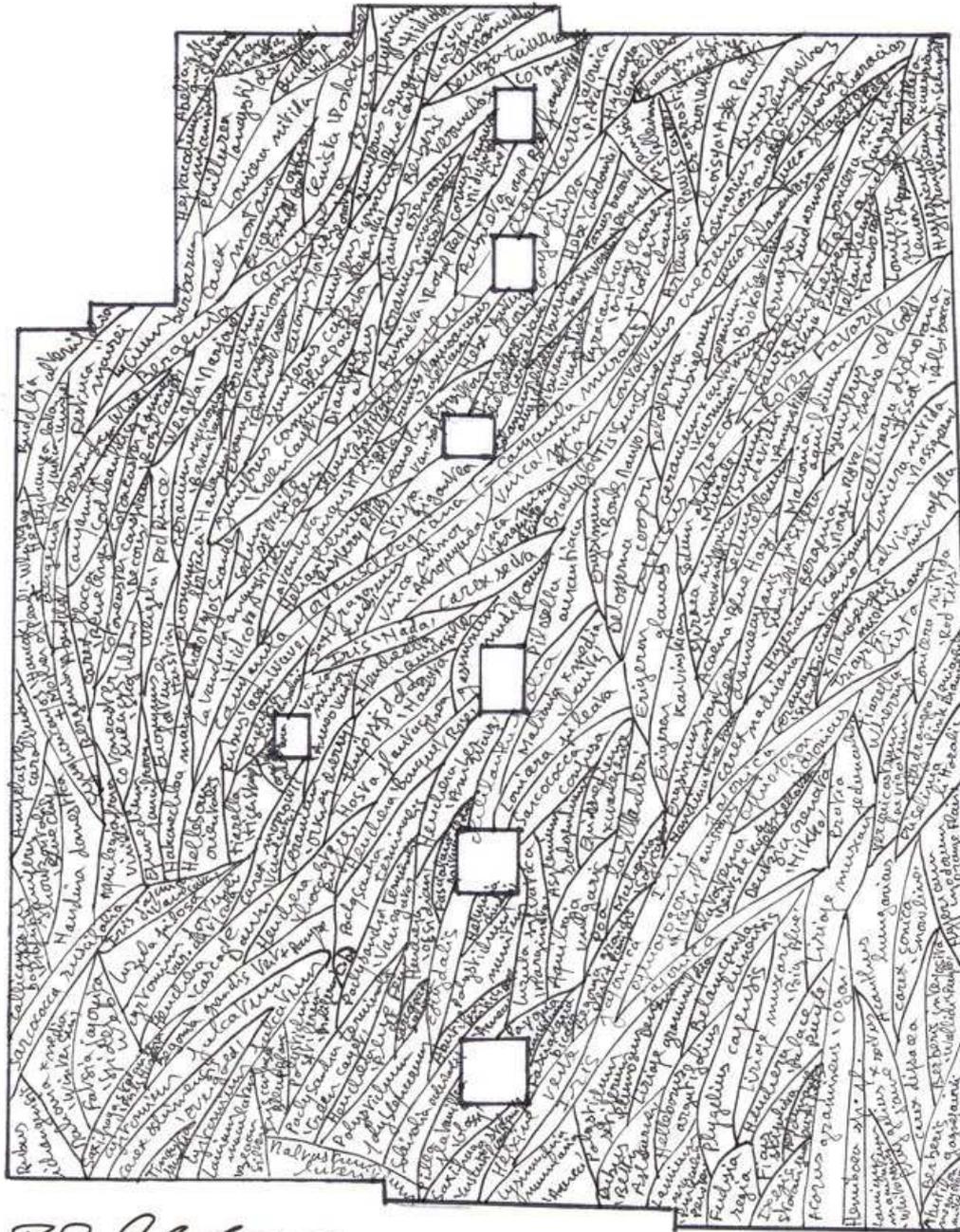
BHV Homme, Paris | ©Patrick Blanc

BHV Homme

Le BHV Marais is a department store in, well, Le Marais. This part of Paris is known for its heavy foot traffic and narrow streets. There is very little in the way of greenery, and little natural light. This makes the vertical garden at BHV *Homme* quite striking, which is exactly the point. 'The amount of space in these cities is increasingly at a premium,' Blanc told the Wall Street Journal, 'so vertical gardens can provide a welcome oasis.'

BHV Homme, 36 Rue de la Verrerie, 75004, Paris

LE MIRAGE VERT - Rue d'Aboukir - PARIS



P. Blanc
17 mars 2013

Le Mirage Vert, Rue d'Aboukir | ©Patrick Blanc

L'Oasis d'Aboukir

Completed in 2013, this installation came after a landlord decided to make his neighbourhood a little more lush. Although undeniably wonderful to view, it's easy to understand why we

don't all get to have one of these: this vertical garden reportedly cost US\$175,000 to install. Patrick Blanc does all the planning himself, including the meticulous selection of plants. This sketch shows how he envisioned L'Oasis d'Aboukir, with the plants' full scientific names indicating their placement.

83 Rue d'Aboukir, 75002, Paris



Rue Alsace, Paris, Sept. 2009 | ©Patrick Blanc

Rue D'Alsace

Nestled between Gare de l'Est and Gare du Nord, in the 10th arrondissement, this is one of Patrick Blanc's largest works. The vertical garden is 15,000 square feet, and yet you might never have known it existed. This alleyway at 11-21 Rue d'Alsace is used primarily for scuttling from one station to the other, most of the commuters barely aware of the spectacular nature growing on the wall above them. The alleyway connects Rue d'Alsace with Rue Faubourg-Saint-Denis, but you'll need to have your wits about you if you want to visit. The passage is virtually invisible on Google Maps, which makes this Blanc masterpiece both enormous and inconspicuous.

Rue d'Alsace, 75010 Paris



Vertical Garden and Christarium at night, Patrick's home | ©Patrick Blanc

Patrick Blanc's Home

This one you can't visit. Blanc lives in Ivry-sur-Seine, just outside Paris to the southeast, in what would appear to be a dilapidated old factory space. Inside is his very own vertical garden masterpiece, with more than 250 plant species growing off the walls. It's even home to birds, lizards and frogs. 'To complete the feeling of a small natural paradise, aerial roots from vines hang like a curtain in the center of the room, while the glass floor of his spacious office area covers an aquarium with fish and aquatic plants.' [[Financial Times](#)] It seems just about the perfect house for a revolutionary landscape designer/botanist, who is trying to bring nature into an otherwise concrete jungle.

All of Patrick Blanc's projects, future and complete, can be viewed at his website, www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com.

By Patrick Whatman