

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark jacket, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is standing in a field of tall, green grass that is slightly out of focus in the foreground. In the background, there are green bushes and trees under a clear blue sky.

MY LIFE AS ENEA

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL MERZ PHOTOS SABINE WUNDERLIN

A career from the soft hills of the Zürcher Oberland to the glorious Everglades of Florida. A life encompassing the wild

youth of an Italian secondo and the glamorous work as a prize-winning international star-gardener.

ZURICH.MINDS member Enzo Enea:
“I create outdoor spaces. Spaces,
people love to live in, because they
feel good there.” Armed with this
credo and his creativity, the man who
studied industrial design and followed
with landscape design, stormed the
international garden scene.

Nothing in Enzo Enea’s park would hold your gaze for any length of time — not the lush, green grass, not the distant hills nor the nearby lake. What catches your attention are the dark and light treetops you can see peeking out above the walls of the garden. These artfully-disheveled, strangely-striking shapes draw you into the park, and as you walk through, you are carried along by the fragmented, stone masonry, inserted like pieces of a backdrop into this landscape of centuries-old trees.

This is Enzo Enea’s tree museum. He has collected aged, beautiful trees that enapture him and has used them to create an elegant park next to the headquarters of his world-renowned landscape design-build company. It is apparent that normal garden landscaping is not Enea’s goal. Several times he clarifies with “I create outdoor spaces.”

Enea’s specialty is to form “spaces people love to live in because they feel good there.” He explains, “When I think of gardens, my first garden, I think of my boyhood summer vacation in Bologna with my grandparents. Grandfather was a well-builder. He knew how to seek and find water! He built wells in Emilia-Romagna that were simply indispensable in those days. That was the way the people on the farms could work and survive.

“At the time, I was eight or nine years old. I would accompany him from morning till evening. You have to imagine it. This was hard work, because it was hot. When they were digging a well, they had to dig deep, mostly by hand. Machines were hardly known at all. And if you had a moment’s time, you’d sit together under the shade of a tree and eat perfectly ripe fruit with a little bread. This was fruit ... maybe a pear ... full of aroma and flavor, unlike anything available today anymore. Old varieties. Forgotten or extinct.



“Grandfather had his own garden where he grew everything you could think of – from artichokes and eggplants to zucchini and plums. He grew what he enjoyed eating himself, and I helped him with it. I raked and hoed. I fertilized with chicken manure, just like he did before me. There were also doves. And when he went home in the evenings, he’d carry a huge basket full of vegetables with him. Grandmother would then prepare them and immediately boil them for preserving afterward. Everything was natural, logical and normal. It was incomparable – ‘learning by doing’.

“Still, these experiences didn’t make such a big impression on me that I immediately wanted to become a gardener. Maybe equally important is that my father had a pottery shop. He imported pots and would sell them to garden centers. I helped him on Saturdays, just doing whatever needed to be done. Other than that, I was always outside, throughout my entire boyhood. I grew up in Tann and would spend whole days in the woods there. I would build treehouses with my co-workers. I would dam brooks and catch trout with my hands. When winter came, you didn’t go home until it started to freeze in the evenings. School? That just more or less ran alongside the rest of my life.

“I studied industrial design. After that came commercial school, and then I finally went to London to study landscape design. It was all very logical, actually. Now at the time, in the middle 80s, London was a big city that was turning into a world metropolis. That’s where I learned English and lived on my own for the first time. After that, I went to America for three years. I had one goal above all: I wanted to go surfing in Maui. Surfing had always been my great passion; I didn’t care if I was on a skateboard, skis, or a surfboard. It was fun, and it remains fun for me today. When I’m surfing, I’ve probably tempted fate every now and then. Whoever tests his limits on a big wave could also drown.

“Now, I’m in Hawaii, on Maui, and I’m surfing. I’m also looking for work because I have to earn money, so that’s how I get my first job – as a kind of assistant landscape architect – while building a hotel park for



the Sheraton Group. I had seen only European gardens until that time, and here’s this garden with tropical plants. And I realize how much variety there is in the world, how many climate zones we have, and how many different plants can be found there. In Maui, there was no budget to limit us. And no control. I met specialists from the Walt Disney Corporation who were building artificial rocks for this project, and I knew ... you can see it, you can feel it ... this American plastic way of thinking – I would never do that kind of thing!

“That was probably when my fascination for outside spaces became clear to me for the first time. Now, this drives me to create my own spaces where people enjoy living – spaces that are usable, spaces where people feel good.

“So I went home, and I tried to explain this to my father. Just imagine: here’s a man who first worked as an electrician in Switzerland before opening a pottery shop. He was self-employed, and he was moderately successful. He fed his family on it. Then his son returns from abroad and wants to turn this business into something completely different. ‘Why do you want to build a beautiful space here? We have to sell pots!’ he said. But I just knew that my own path was different. So a number of machine-made pots get smashed, and on top of those shards, I showcased beautiful, handmade pots with plants in them. That makes a big difference. I showed the first terraced spaces as I envisioned them, and I also laid out a small park. And, yes, what I showcased there became a success.

“I learned a lot over the years of my training and my first career experiences. But as a

landscape architect, you have to accept that every situation you encounter is new and so it has to be solved on an individual basis. The approach is always the same: you have to learn how to read places.

“First of all, you have to consider some very straightforward facts, questions like: Where is the place located? What temperatures can we expect? Is it a sloping hillside, or is it flat terrain? In short, the place and its statistics are unalterable. But then you still have the personal facts related to the people commissioning the job. What kind of individuals are they? What are their preferences? Are they a family? If so, are there also children who want to play outside? How many private areas should the garden feature? My primary job is to bring meaning to the work.

“When it comes to the role of the customer and his wishes, the starting point is clear there, too. I try to act as a funnel for all the ideas and then choose those things that make sense. This is where the dialogue begins and provides the key to the assignment. As simple as this sounds, it’s not simple. Just because someone is a major fan of Italy, that’s a long way off from meaning that I’m going to furnish him with an olive tree because it would die after a few years. That would be a shame, so that’s not something we need.

“For a project to be as successful as possible, there’s still one more especially important condition. You have to remain curious. Today, we work in 18 countries, often simultaneously, and from two locations, Switzerland and the U.S., so the ideas and impulses for solutions to different assignments come from the most varied sources. Now, it’s not just me. We have a whole team of collaborators.

“Aside from that, the solutions don’t always have their origin in logic. An inspiration can as easily come from how you perceive a reflection on the surface of the water as from the scent of flowers or even the sight of a beautiful horse galloping by. You see something for a moment, and that something sinks into you, and the next morning when you awaken, it’s still there. You absorb it, and a solution is born. The fact that such



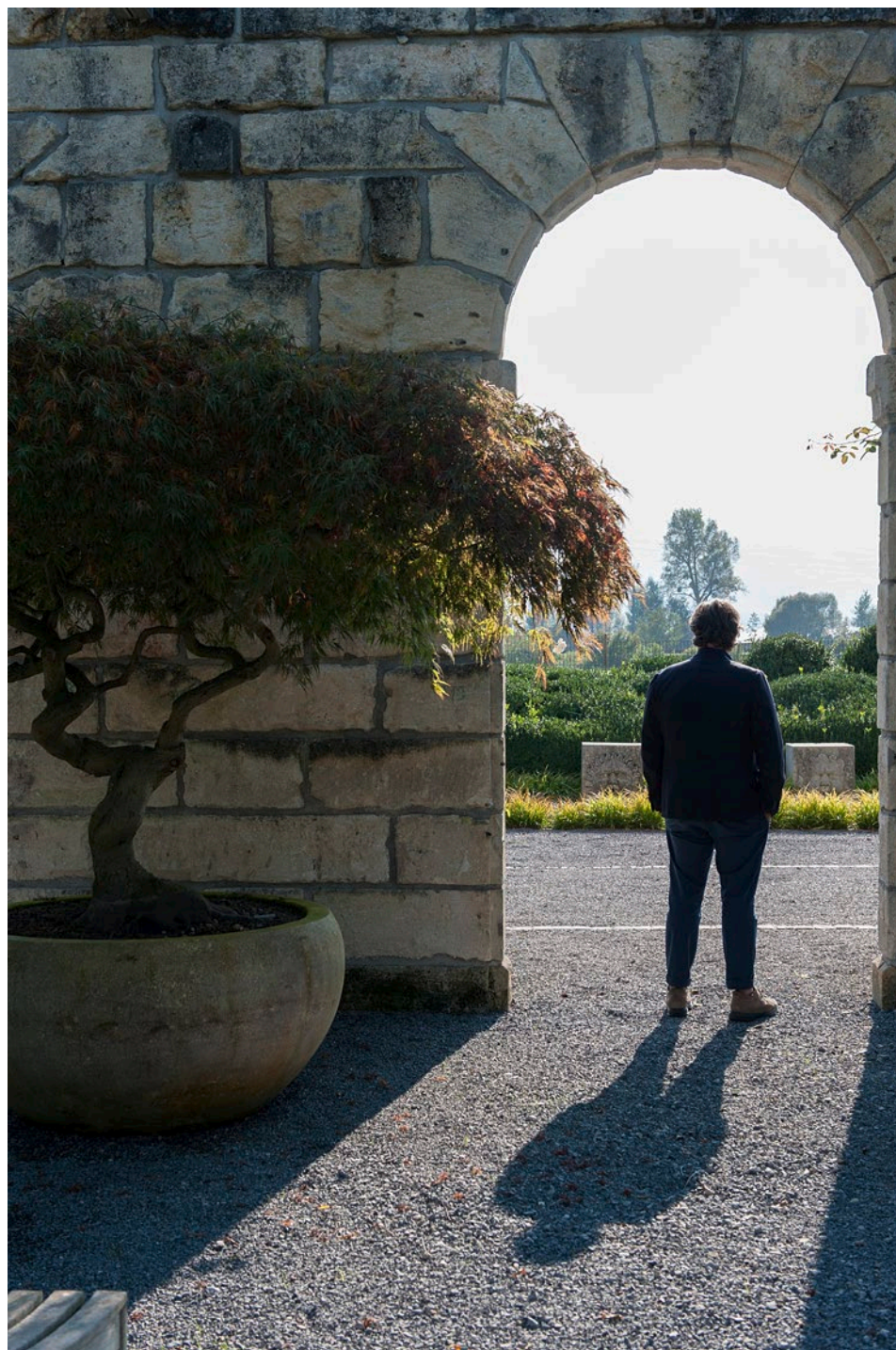
Fragmented stone masonry, wrought iron gates and delapidated classical facades, figure as dramatic backdrops to gnarled, twisted mountain trees and centuries-old leaved giants.

an insight is possible repeatedly amazes me. It even surprises me. And again: we're a team. There are both fresh and great talents. All of us take up things and ideas, and from those we filter out what's usable. The ideas grow – and that's how solutions are born.

“Take my tree museum, for instance. The starting point is my love of trees. I have to confess: a beautiful tree fills me with a deep inner joy. For me, it's something of exceptional beauty. I try to understand the place where it grows. That way, the place teaches me something, and what I've learned this way will someday unfold – right when the demand and need occur.

“It all started with the construction of new buildings and new garden landscaping projects where I'd come across trees that would have been sawed down if I hadn't had them dug up, complete with their roots, and taken them with me. They were all at my place then, in a meadow. For decades, I cared for them and shaped them. A tree like that is a miracle. It allows for an unbelievable variety of living spaces. It gives shade and shelter to those who stand beneath it. It provides a home for the crow. Its leaves and fruit are food for the animals. Trees produce oxygen and bind CO². It's an object. A tree is alive. But people seem to have lost the feeling for all this.

“That it became a tree museum was not intentional. But now we've created an installation from these trees that should heighten visitors' awareness of 'the tree' and 'nature.' So there the trees stand behind, before, and between objects, walls, buildings, and partial facades, and from that, spaces emerge. It's not just a forest of beautiful trees. These trees can be encircled. In doing so, their structures change, and with the light play, the texture of the leaves and the branches shifts. Here, 50 mighty, ancient trees all fit together, even though they're all completely different. Basically, this tree museum is supposed to be like a perfect sequence of dishes on a great menu. Each individual dish is perfectly seasoned and already a masterpiece in itself. But the menu as a whole is an impressive total art work. Unforgettable.



“Believe it or not, I'm not at all interested in building the equivalent of my own personal pyramids here. This tree museum is not supposed to immortalize me in any way. I don't think that far ahead. I don't function that way. The fact that I'm here at Jona has a lot to do with luck. I had trees, and the nuns at the nearby convent liked the idea of a park and gave me the land for it.

“In our business, we create three-dimensional pictures that you can spend time in. I always believed in this – and I still carry this thought with me. The deciding point is that whatever I do has to come from joy. Everyday.”

“I make no claims to do it – from a basic sense of joy. Maybe that comes from a sort of perpetual boyishness that has stayed, creating art with my work. An artist creates art because he neither has nor feels any limits within it, but we actually work only with limits. There are endless specifications: weight, width, height, neighbors, climate, locations and lots of other constants that we have to take into account before we can look for solutions. No – I'm not an artist. I'm a landscape architect, an artisan who approaches his work through analysis, someone who tries to create pictures that have fragrance.” ♦

