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“Trees are invaluable”

They call him the Picasso of gardens: Enzo Enea designs private gardens and parks all over the world. His success story began with a peach tree.

INTERVIEW: VIRGINIA NOLAN

Old trees that Enea saved from the saw have found a new home in the tree museum, which is open to the public.

Spring is here. What do you associate with this time of year?

The beginning of spring especially is an emotional moment for me: the colors of the magnolia announcing something new, the fruit trees blossoming one after the other. Nature is waking up and so are we. For me, spring symbolizes new beginnings, the chance to tackle things with a fresh approach. And I can finally ride a motorbike again.

Spring is considered a time of inspiration. What's yours?

The snapshots when I succeed in looking at nature's dimensions, proportions or colors from a new perspective and relate them to each other in a totally new way. It may be the course of a river that inspires me, a lighting situation, a shadow cast. In my mind, these elements come together to form a picture.

The landscapes you create also resemble pictures. Do you consider yourself an artist?

I don't actually. A painter has creative freedom with their canvas, it's only the gallery owner who is confronted with others' demands. My work is different. I have to take lots of factors into account – technical ones in terms of drainage, planting or materials, but also legal ones such as safety issues or structural specifications. And of course there are different needs when it comes to the desired use of a garden or park. I am an artist just for a brief moment: when I enter a property for the first time and try to capture the situation and surrounding nature in the way I described earlier. A picture emerges in my mind from this, which I have to reconcile with the different requirements afterwards. That's almost an art in itself (laughing).



Enea didn't think twice about relocating a pine grove that was to be cleared to the city center in Beijing for a park.

What distinguishes a well-designed garden?

First and foremost, the feeling it conveys – like a painting you chose because you like looking at it. And, this is key to me: A well-designed garden provides added value for the whole property. A garden has value if it is laid out in a scientifically and technically correct way. But the added value comes into play where a designer knows how to connect the extended space to the existing one in such a way to create a harmonious whole.

Could you explain that?

Designers tend to think of a building and the land surrounding it as separate entities. So the architect's perspective ends at the patio and the garden designer's at the house wall. We take a different approach, working from the outside in, understanding the garden and the house as parts of a whole that relate to each other. It is particularly important with modern construction, which relies on floor-to-ceiling windows

ENZO ENEA



(1964) grew up in Tann in the Zürcher Oberland. After training as an industrial designer, he studied landscape architecture in London. This was followed by a stay in Hawaii, where Enea completed his first park design for a Sheraton hotel. He later took over his father's business selling terracotta and sandstone pots and built the one-man operation into a company with 270 employees. Enea GmbH in Rapperswil-Jona plans and implements public and private projects – also for celebrities such as Tina Turner or the late Beatles singer George Harrison. Enea's pet project is the tree museum, which opened in 2010. It is located in the 75,000 square meter park surrounding the company headquarters and is home to over 50 trees, some of them very old, which Enea saved from the saw, as well as works by renowned artists. enea.ch

and unobstructed views, that the interior and exterior colors, shapes and textures are coordinated. Otherwise there will be unsightly breaks in style.

You are the most famous garden designer in Switzerland. What set you on this path?

My grandfather in northern Italy. He took me to his garden every summer. Once we had worked long hours in the burning heat and I felt incredibly thirsty. My grandfather picked a peach from the tree and gave it to me. That moment was like a revelation: The juice running down my cheeks, that perfect aroma the fruit held. I thought, "If trees can produce something so delicious, they must be special creatures."

Your pet project is also dedicated to trees: In your tree museum there are specimens that you have saved from the saw.

Trees are invaluable. They give us oxygen, which we cannot live without. Year after year they produce more of it. In Switzerland, we have a comparatively intact



Enea knows a well-designed garden is distinguished by one thing above all: the feeling it conveys.

natural environment, so we do not value it enough: If a garage is planned and the hundred-year-old lime tree is in the way, the tree has to go. A tree that old produces as much oxygen as 2,000 young trees, and you have to plant them first. The tree museum is my way of giving back to the trees. I have developed a pruning technique based on the bonsai method, which allows me to even move large trees instead of cutting them down. We have designed entire parks in Asia and South America using this approach.

Tell us about them.

When we were commissioned with a park in Beijing, I observed how visitors to the Imperial Palace always had their picture taken in front of a gnarled pine tree. I asked what it was all about, and was told that such an old tree was something valuable that no amount of money in the world could buy. That gave me an idea: We sourced the trees for the park from a pine forest near the city that was going to be cleared, and staged the pines as the park centerpiece. We are currently

doing something similar in São Paulo, where a habitat is being created on a former landfill site. We relocated trees from a patch of primeval forest that had to make way for buildings to the heart of the metropolis. Just like in Beijing, these old trees, which produce much more oxygen than young ones ever could, now provide better air. The example from Beijing shows impressively how what would have been carelessly felled in the forest becomes a cult object where nature is scarce. In principle, this is absurd. But perhaps we can learn from this to already care for nature where it is still intact.

VIRGINIA NOLAN is a freelance journalist and author in Zurich. She mainly writes on social and savoir-vivre topics.