



of the administration building, including such favorites as sedum, liriopse, iris and tiarella. Clearly linked in proportion and fenestration to the 19th-century buildings beside it, the facade is an artfully composed vertical landscape of 1,500 plants growing out of the wall. This engaging garden is the creation of French botanist and artist Patrick Blanc, whose signature, patented vertical gardens transform contemporary architecture into living works of art.

"Working on a vertical plane implies a totally different approach to plant display," says the 53-year-old Blanc. "My compositions deal with plant volume, leaf colors and leaf pattern. Flowers are usually a bonus ... For many species, growing vertically is closer to their natural habit than growing in a pot or on the man-made horizontal plane."

On his first expedition to the tropics at 19, Blanc noticed many understory plants grew on rocks and trunks and needed little light or soil as long as they had moisture. He was still a student when he built his first "plants everywhere room" in 1978. Sixteen years later, he was the star of the third Chaumont garden festival, where his vertical garden installation astonished visitors. Today, Blanc, a working scientist specializing in tropical plants (who frequently sports green hair), has completed 150 vertical gardens. His system of drip irrigation and rot-proof growing medium on a metal frame can be used both indoors and out. Two indoor installations in New York City are the Girbaud store in Soho and a dramatic second-floor window display at the Phyto spa in Midtown. He often works

From top: Wall of plants in the courtyard of Ken Club fitness center in Paris and green "cube" on an office building in Nanterre, France, both by designer Patrick Blanc.



on high-profile projects with major names in architecture and design, like Jean Nouvel (at Branly and the Fondation Cartier), but he has also created a wall in a blighted suburb of Paris.

Vertical gardens are a worldwide phenomenon and some environmentalists envision cities clothed in green. Two years ago, at Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan, a 164-yard-long planted vertical wall, dubbed the "Bio Lung," showcased 30 vertical garden systems, and the Vancouver Aquarium in British Columbia recently opened a new building with a green wall of native species. In Australia, innovative landscape architect Vladimir Sitta has been musing on vertical gardens for 20 years: "I'm a techno-optimist," he says. "We used technology to screw things up—we can turn to technology to save us." —NANCY BERNER

fyi Vladimir Sitta will be discussing his design philosophy in a lecture titled "Vertical Green: Inevitable Gestures in Modern Cities" at the Chicago Botanic Garden, April 26, 7-9 pm. For more information, call C at 847-835-8261 or see chicagobotanic.org/sch