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Replanting the World's Concrete Jungles, One Wall at a Time

By [Kristin Hohenadel](#)



L'Oasis d'Aboukir, a new vertical garden on the side of a residential building in Paris.

Photo courtesy of Yann Monel

Patrick Blanc is a French botanist and designer who invented the concept of the vertical garden and has been on a quest to green walls across the planet with his plant-based creations for the last 25 years.

Last week Blanc inaugurated a new vertical garden blanketing 2,700 square feet of an 82-foot-tall wall with 236 different kinds of plants. The plant wall is designed in a verdant wave pattern on a formerly drab southwest-facing Parisian street corner at 83 de la Rue d'Aboukir in the 2nd arrondissement. He calls it a “hymn to biodiversity.”



Patrick's Blanc's blank canvas on rue d'Aboukir.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc

This latest project in the heart of Paris is one of 250 vertical gardens that Blanc has conceptualized and built in public and private, indoor and outdoor spaces around the globe. These include the world's largest vertical garden in France's Les Clayes sous Bois, and the tallest vertical garden in the world in Sydney, as well as vertical gardens for the new Miami Art Museum building and recent projects in the deserts of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.



A close-up of the vertical garden on rue d'Aboukir.

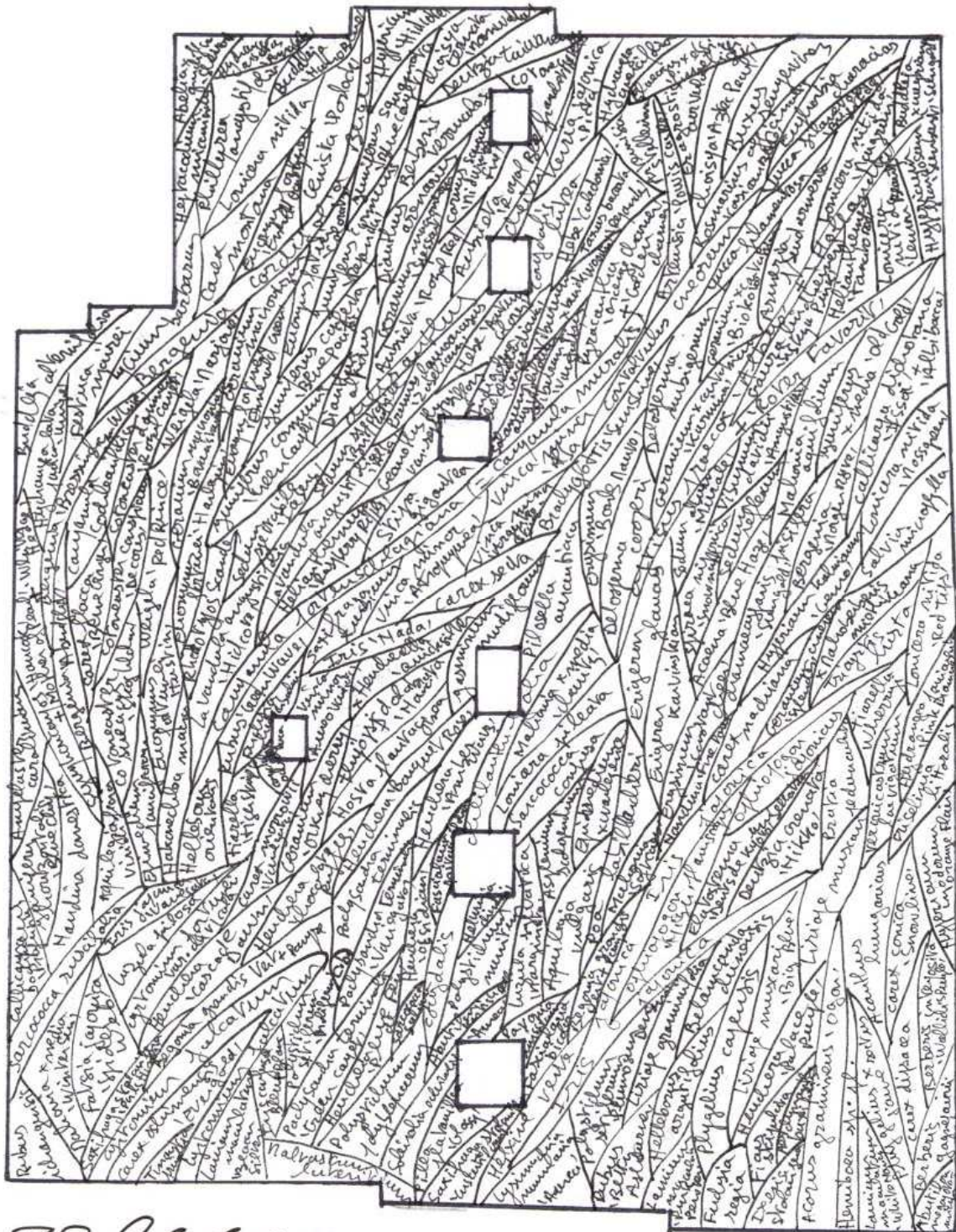
Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc

Blanc started experimenting with novel ways to make plants thrive without soil and in limited light as a 12-year-old growing up in the Paris suburbs, and he has studied plant growth on expeditions around the world for his work as a researcher with the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris for more than three decades.

But he works like a designer, making detailed sketches of each project. And his designs are copyrighted, like works of art.

LE MIRAGE VERT

- Rue d'Aboukir - PARIS



A signed sketch by Blanc details the form and exact plant specifications for each project.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc

Vertical gardens are built on a solid metal, PVC and nonbiodegradable felt frame that prevents damage to walls and allows plants to grow without soil.

The gardens have built-in watering systems and require limited maintenance that consists of removing dead leaves or replacing plants that don't thrive.



In February, the building facade was prepared to install plants.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc



One

week after plant installation in April.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc



The wall in full bloom.

Photo courtesy of Yann Monel

The gardens can thrive over time. When I visited Blanc's home during a 2007 interview, a plant wall in his living room had been there for 25 years.

The new project was inaugurated during Paris Design Week on Sept. 10. Like every one of Blanc's vertical gardens, it provides a grace note of lush verdant plant life in an unexpected place.



The vertical garden at night.

Photo courtesy of Yann Monel

In fact, every one of Blanc's vertical gardens is a revelation, making you wonder why city governments around the world don't use vertical gardens more often when such an elegant solution exists for reintroducing nature into manmade environments.

Paris is currently striving to green the city. But the effort includes letting weeds grow in the formerly manicured asphalt and the planting of more trees. Blanc's striking garden was the initiative of a private landlord who wanted to beautify his neighborhood.

Of course, as an urban planner pointed out to me, many boring, blank, graffiti-splashed urban walls belong to private citizens, not cities themselves, which tend to own horizontal space like sidewalks and traditional gardens.

And then there is the matter of getting people to spend money on what are still perceived as somewhat radical or luxurious ideas. The cost of a Patrick Blanc-designed vertical garden is about \$65 per square foot plus labor, meaning that the Rue d'Aboukir project came in at around \$175K. But imitators the world over have found ways to get plants on walls for less; even Lowe's sells vertical wall planters to help space and cash-strapped urban dwellers in need of greenery.

Still, it's easy to imagine how greener walls could create urban utopias cities the world over. The rooftop garden has had an urban renaissance. Why not a vertical garden revolution?



Patrick Blanc in Indonesia last spring.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Blanc

**Correction, Sept. 18, 2013: This post originally and mistakenly described the vertical garden as being on a southwest street, rather than a southwest-facing street.*