

LORD OF THE TREES

Landscape Architect and designer ENZO ENEA with offices in Rapperswil-Jona, Zürich, Miami and New York is devoted to landscape architecture.

He has designed gardens and landscapes all over the world and won a number of prestigious awards along the way.

We in the Czech Republic will also have the opportunity to admire his work – he has designed the landscaping for a unique project in Nebřenice near Prague going by the name of The Oaks Prague.

Words: Eva Hlinovská **Photographs:** Enzo Enea Archive

If you want to experience what it means when nature actually forces you to become aware of its power, there is no need to make for the rainforests or journey to Alaska. You simply have to pay a visit to the Swiss town of Rapperswil. There, in the industrial quarter of Jona, you will find the headquarters of Enea Landscape Architecture. The company was established in 1993 when Enzo Enea took over the garden decoration company founded by his father.

More than two hundred people now work there, together with Enzo Enea devoting their time to designing gardens and landscape architecture in general. Their work, however, also involves designing a variety of pergola, outdoor saunas and kitchens – everything you might need to be able to enjoy the time you spend in your garden. Or hotel gardens, or gardens for the family.

The bright, minimalist premises in which Enzo Enea GmbH/Ltd. is based boasts one wall that is made entirely of glass and which opens into a magnificent garden. This, however, is not simply an example of the work of Enzo Enea. The garden, which covers an area of 75,000 square metres not far from Lake Zurich, is open to the

public. It is not simply a garden, of course, but the Tree Museum which Enzo Enea opened in 2010. „We should understand that we usually take something from nature – but we should give something back to her as well. Trees are an essential part of our lives: after all, they produce oxygen,“ says Enzo Enea in describing why he decided to build a Tree Museum in Rapperswil-Jona.

The Tree Museum

Just as there are signs in a museum to describe the different statues or paintings, there are descriptions here of the individual trees. There are fifty here and some of them are more than one hundred years old. The collection is solely composed of varieties which belong to our climate zone. Enea frequently came across trees that had to be taken down and he decided to save them instead.

When I stroll along the paths around them at the end of November, I breathe in the unbelievable beauty and the freshness of the air (helped, of course, by the nearby mountain ranges), while at the same time being surrounded by the atmosphere of eternity (and I am not afraid to say it). At that moment I have to agree with the words uttered by Enzo

Enea during our interview for Esprit LN.

„I am an optimist as far as the future of our planet is concerned. But it is hard keeping that optimism when you hear the stories you do each and every day – fires, earthquakes, the devastation of the rainforests. I think we ought to realise that we need nature. And that it does not actually need us. Hopefully it is not too late to save it, even now.“

The environment, the use of plastics and the monumental level of waste are issues that Enzo Enea mentions several times during the interview. Who other than a man who loves trees and has devoted his work to nature should, in fact? Perhaps this is true because he spent all his summer holidays as a child in his grandfather's garden in northern Italy. It was there that he listened to talk of growing plants and caring for trees, of crops, harvest and soil.

Highly-topical issues in terms of our relationship to nature are also treated by some of the artworks found in the Museum of Trees and inside the company's premises themselves. „Over My Dead Body“, a piece created by Claire Morgan, for example, which depicts the body of an owl trapped in a ball of black plastic.





Bringing the landscape and architecture together

Among his work, Enzo Enea has designed the landscape for The Oaks Prague project, which is being built by Arendon Development in Nebřenice near Prague. Villas, apartments, a little town with shops and services, a hotel and a golf course are being built over 140 hectares of land within the landscape of Central Bohemia.

The first stage of the residential properties and services are set for completion next year. Apartments designed by Chapman Taylor will be built on the square, while the apartments and penthouses that overlook the golf course have been designed by the no-less famous Richard Meyer and Partners. The standalone villas in the village, meanwhile, are the work of Czech architectural office ADR, founded by Petr Kolář and Aleš Lapka. There are other standalone villas that look on to the greenery of the golf course in which the Czech and global architectural elite have played their part in designing.

Of course it is no easy task to bring together all these properties and servi-

ces so that they hold together. Enzo Enea won the tender for the landscape design for The Oaks Prague, his very name providing clients with the guarantee that the landscape of the whole complex will be absolutely perfect.

„It is clear that my primary inspiration was the old oak avenue, which I decided to extend,“ he says in describing his work on the project. Incidentally, the oak is his favourite tree – it is not only beautiful when fully-grown, but the wood from the tree is used to make the vats in which wine matures. „As soon as we found out about the project, we wanted to be part of it and to have the chance of working with talents such as John Pawson and Chapman Taylor. Bringing our work and theirs together is simply divine. And that is what we do best – bring architecture and the landscape together. After all, The Oaks motto is „Be close to the outdoors and the country“ and that is obviously something we feel from the heart,“ describes Enzo Enea.

In spite of the fact that The Oaks Prague project differs from those involving hotel gardens or gardens for homes, for example, which Enzo Enea also designs,

mostly in terms of the scale, work on the project is the same as for other landscaping challenges taken on by Enzo Enea all over the world. The philosophy on which he and his colleagues draw is one of „genius loci“. „The place itself tells you what to do,“ explains Enzo Enea dryly.

It is not quite as simple as that, of course: the landscape architect must know to perfection the composition of the soil at the location, the plants that have grown there for centuries (for this reason the first visit paid to new locations sees the architects going to the local botanic gardens and consulting botanists), the microclimate, the direction and strength of the wind and the make-up of the air (coastal air, for example, contains salt particles, which some plants obviously do not appreciate). Only then is the landscape architect able to design a garden in such a way that it looks great and where the plants and trees in the garden can thrive.

The taste of peach

When I ask Enzo Enea for a definition of landscape architecture, the mulls this

over, looking for the right words to express his thinking. „It is very important for architecture itself because it prolongs the lifetime of that architecture and raises the experience of that unique place we call home. Landscape architecture connects you to nature, your surroundings, and integrates the architecture and landscape. You cannot be surrounded by concrete and glass alone,“ explains this charismatic man with medium-length grey hair and black-rimmed glasses.

He goes on to say that the Ancient Romans built gardens around their rural villas, that the English in particular raised the bar and that the popular Japanese gardens of today are just as beautiful. „But you know what? I would never transport a Japanese garden elsewhere, as is commonly the case these days. Because I believe that the location of the garden is just as important as the garden itself,“ says Enzo Enea, whose first major contract came at the end of the 1980s at the Hotel Sheraton in Hawaii, where the young architect enjoyed surfing. It was his first tropical garden, in the opu-

lent style of the late eighties, and was home to waterfalls and live flamingos.

„Our biggest challenge is the difference between the climate on individual continents. It is thanks to our philosophy of „genius loci“ that we tailor our gardens to match the local conditions, everywhere we work, and this is something our clients value,“ he describes, adding that in Switzerland, for example, the most popular parts of each and every garden are a variety of fences and walls designed to protect privacy.

In Asia, people generally want treated and cultivated gardens, whereas people in the north favour the „rural aspect“, preferring practical gardens where they can pick fruit from the trees and enjoy it. As it happens, even now Enzo Enea remembers the taste of a peach that his Italian grandfather picked for him as a young boy.

Think globally

Enzo Enea studied industrial design. „The designer deals with the function of the building and its proper interaction with the user. Now replace the word

building with the word garden – the same applies to the gardens that I design. One obvious condition alongside the functionality is the aesthetic quality. Neither should we forget the different outdoor buildings that have to work perfectly in the garden. Everything is connected,“ describes Enzo Enea, who obviously uses natural materials such as wood and stone in his work. „What use would plastic be to me?“ he asks rhetorically.

It is his view that gardens are important, and not simply because the value of the property you own rises with the garden. „The most important thing to me is the quality of life, because you can spend the best of times in the garden – time with your family,“

And, of course, a garden is a place where Enzo’s beloved trees can grow. „We can’t change the world as such, but I think we can change our own world. We think globally and work locally. We endeavour to make sure that every place that we design, where we work, brings something better to the environment. In short, we do what we can.“