

March 20, 2013

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## Laurent Corradi and the Hanging Gardens of New York City (PHOTOS)

Posted: 03/20/2013 2:24 pm

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The vertical garden may be as old an idea as the legendary hanging gardens of Babylon but it is also as contemporary as the lofty space in the [Rubenstein Atrium](#) at Lincoln Center. It's impossible to know for certain what one of the seven wonders of the world was like, but in the modern age, all one need do is visit the Rubenstein Atrium to understand the power of the idea. The two vertical gardens there are the work of Laurent Corradi and his partner Marie-Christine Steffanetti of PlantWallDesign. The immense hanging gardens in the atrium are unexpected in their size and unforgettable in their impact.

Corradi, a native of Marseilles who designs and builds these installations, traces his passion for vertical gardening to the French pioneer in vertical gardening, Patrick Blanc. The scope of Corradi's work, however, transcends gardening and places it in the realm of art. Each vertical garden he creates is living artistry with its own colors, patterns and textures.

The commission for the Rubenstein Atrium came about as a result of Corradi and Steffanetti's first big job in New York for [Phyto Universe Spa](#) on Lexington Avenue in 2005. In the original plans, Phyto had asked for a series of vertical gardens to be included as a design element in the spa but the project ran into trouble when there was no one who knew how to realize the design. If the irrigation could not be supplied without undue weight stress on the walls the vertical gardens were in danger of being cut from the final design. Corradi, with his background as a hydraulic systems engineer, was able to step in and solve the technical issues and made it work. He also made it beautiful. The visibility of the installation from Lexington Avenue below the spa created a buzz on the street and their reputation spread quickly. They have been working steadily ever since with commissions in New York City, Canada, France and Turkey.

At the time that they executed the design for Phyto Spa, PlantWallDesign was the only company in town doing such work. Now there are many competitors. Corradi strives to differentiate his concept from the others as a living, self-sustaining and self-contained garden cum work of art. It mimics the growing environment of a tropical forest with a thin layer of medium similar to humus topped with felt that serves the same purpose as moss does in nature to retain moisture. Corradi's favored plants for these installations are tropical varieties because they are fairly low maintenance. The first month is the most crucial time in the installation of these artworks because the moisture levels must be frequently monitored to maintain the proper level for sustained growth. Once all the plants have securely taken root and are growing well, the vertical garden is thereafter largely self-maintaining.

Every garden created by PlantWallDesign is unique and serves as living art in its environment. Corradi creates the designs according to the customer's requirements with some spontaneity left to the last moment. He likens his bare plant walls to a blank canvas. The plants are his medium and he must ultimately work with what is available from the plant nursery in Long Island that supplies all his "living medium." This means that when something he wants is not available he must improvise. There have been many different concepts and rationales for vertical gardens but for Corradi it's all about aesthetics. He believes that gardens like this add immeasurably to our quality of life. While he has not yet been able to commission longitudinal studies to prove the health benefits of his vertical gardens, he feels certain that they improve air quality.

Corradi's latest commission was for Baldev Duggal of Duggal Visual Solutions. Duggal is also a visionary and his is one of the few photo printing houses to survive the changeover of photography to the digital age. His facility in the Brooklyn Navy Shipyard is the location for the project called "[the Green House](#)." It is part of Duggal's new company, [Duggal Energy Solutions](#), dedicated to working toward sustainable energy solutions for the twentieth century. Corradi's relationship with Baldev Duggal dates back to that first job at the Phyto Universe Spa on Lexington Avenue where Duggal was a customer. In this project, Duggal uses the latest in green design to point the way toward a future of sustainable energy ideas.

While light is the central issue in most of his designs, the project at Duggal's "Green House" has offered an ideal situation as it has a glass wall facing south. This places the garden in an ideal lighting situation, especially through the winter months when light is scarce. Corradi said that this is his favorite location so far. However, this project had been in the planning stages since 2006, when Duggal first conceived the idea of having one of Corradi and Steffanetti's vertical gardens in his Green House project. Delays are inevitable in large

conceived the idea of having one of Corradi and Steffanetti's vertical gardens in his Green House project. Delays are inevitable in large scale projects and there are never enough of these large projects to go around. The result is that revenue can be sporadic. This is why Corradi and Steffanetti have pushed forward to expand their reach into the home market. Corradi is now ready to take the next step in the evolution of the vertical garden by making it available to the average person to have one at home.

### Vertical Gardens for the Home

Corradi acknowledges that the vertical gardens he builds are beyond the reach of the average consumer and he is going to change that with his latest venture, a modular vertical garden for the home. To further this venture, Corradi and Steffanetti have formed a new partnership called LiveVG (Live Vertical Garden) with Lauren and Justin Gueli. Measuring 21 square feet, these units are completely self-contained and mobile with casters so that they can serve as moveable walls. They have water tanks, built-in lighting and rechargeable batteries to power the units that can go three weeks without recharging.

Corradi's concept allows the consumer to select the plants and create a unique home vertical garden to suit their own environment and tastes. The LiveVG can be made in an array of finishes even including mahogany framing. Allowing choice is central to this idea as the LiveVG, having two faces, can be planted on one side or both sides depending on the customer's needs. Corradi envisions the LiveVG in office spaces as well as in homes where it can serve as a divider that creates individual working spaces or divide larger rooms. It can be planted as a garden on one side with the other dedicated to work space for an office or it can be decorative for the home. For the home consumer, Corradi will also offer the indoor vertical vegetable garden. Again, the selection of plants is up to the consumer. He sees mobility as the key to success in this market. The modular walls are low enough to be rolled through a standard doorway and require little maintenance. Prototypes are nearing the final stage and will soon be ready for the public. Corradi feels that now the time is right and he can finally bring the vertical garden to the home market for a price that is affordable.

*Top image: Vertical Garden for the Duggal Green House in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Photo courtesy of Jorge M. Correa Jr., Duggal Visual Solution*

# Detail of the Vertical Garden at Duggal Green House project

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Images from the work of Laurent Corradi of PlantWallDesign, all photos courtesy of Laurent Corradi

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