



PHOTOGRAPHS: John Campbell WORDS: Stephanie Mahon

MED SCHOOL

The new Radicepura Festival aims to excite and educate visitors and promote Mediterranean landscape design

The inaugural Radicepura Garden Festival opened this April near Catania in Sicily, and is the brainchild of the Faro family, who run the nursery Piante Faro on the island, specialising in Mediterranean plants.

“There is a long history of landscaping in the UK, but not here in the Med,” explains Mario Faro. “We want the festival to increase the culture of the landscape in the south, and send a message that we should be developing these ideas here. We also want the festival to become known for encouraging young designers and landscapers under 35, investing in the next generation.”

For this first show, which runs until October and has the theme ‘Mediterranean Essence’, four international designers were asked to create gardens, and six other gardens were chosen from a call for entries from less-established designers and students. These exhibits were all, where possible, made from local materials such as lava stone, and built by the Piante Faro team. There are also several installations, artworks and educational features on display, and a full programme of events and exhibitions.

The showground is on the site of the two-hectare Radicepura Botanic Garden, which is still in development, but will be completed next year, and open for the second edition of the festival in 2018. Here we take a brief look at the best of this year’s show.



01 ANAMORPHOSIS

François Abélanet

THIS INSTALLATION by François Abélanet appears from ground level to be an arrangement of geometric beds of aromatic plants on stilts. The magic happens upon climbing steps to a viewing platform, and taking a photograph, revealing a sort of visual trickery reminiscent of magic eye pictures. The piece is a complex play on perspective inspired by a device used in painting as far back as the Renaissance, where a distorted view appears normal when viewed from a particular point or with the right lens.

02 ARETHUSA AND ALPHEUS

Helen and James Basson MSGD

HELEN AND JAMES BASSON MSGD drew on the link between the heritages of Sicily and Greece for their garden, inspired by the ancient myth of the god Alpheus, who fell in love with the nymph Arethusa when he saw her bathing. The garden is one of the most enclosed at the show, offering visitors a quiet zone of contemplation behind its walls and lush Mediterranean planting – which will continue to develop throughout the festival period – while a feature pool reflects an ethereal curtain of air plants.



03 AMITY

Kamelia Bin Zaal

KAMELIA BIN ZAAAL'S outdoor room draws on the principles of traditional Arabian courtyards. Dark stone platforms lead in from four sides past pale gravel and tile to the central star-shaped fountain; soft shade sails offer respite from the heat; and white roses contrast with dark sedges. But the space is concerned with something most serious – the war in Syria. The monochrome scheme is inspired by the black and white architecture of both that country and Sicily, and the garden is intended to offer a relaxing place where people can come together, with hope.



04 TOUR D'Y VOIR

Michel Péna

FRENCH DESIGNER MICHEL PÉNA'S ‘garden’ is a cylindrical tower of scaffolding with a double helicoidal stairway within, inspired by the work of Leonardo da Vinci. Climb to the top to get a 360-degree view of the landscape, including Mount Etna, the ancient site of Taormina, the sea and the botanic garden site to the north, south, east and west. The relish with which both kids and adults enjoy the piece make it the perfect slice of novelty for festival goers.



05 EVAPORAZIONE MEDITERRANEA

Stefano Passerotti and Chicco Margaroli

CREATED BY STEFANO PASSEROTTI and artist Chicco Margaroli, this installation is a pool of water with several large trees, straddled by a tunnel painted gold within and clad in golden bark without, and punctuated with funnels. It is a reflection on the water of the Mediterranean basin, which is losing salinity, leading to faster evaporation, meaning the area could eventually dry up; but vegetation can help. Visitors enter the wheelchair-friendly tunnel, sit on the benches that line the sides (see opening image, page 41), and take a moment to enjoy the golden light and slice of water below.



06 IDENTITÀ MEDITERRANEA

University of Bologna

CREATED BY 20 students from the University of Bologna, this show garden addresses diversity. Globalisation has led to a diminishing of individual cultures and identities, including those of the Mediterranean regions, making us all very similar. To highlight this, the focal point in this garden of stone walls, light-up eggs and olive trees is an offset cube structure with books strewn on the floor inside, visible through slits cut into the side.



07 JARDIN DE MANTILLE

Maia Agor

SPANISH DESIGNER Maia Agor has designed a garden based on the mantilla, the black lace veil used in the Mediterranean. The veil conceals and protects the wearer, allowing her to see without being seen. This garden of sensuality features mounded beds of cacti and succulents around a lava stone terrace dissected by rills and small pools. Around the outside, black lace and mesh panels shelter the intimate space from view.



08 PASSAGE TO MEDITERRANEAN

Istanbul Technical University & Mustafa Kemal University

A TEAM OF TURKISH architecture students are responsible for this piece, a steel-framed tunnel wrapped in rope, with a central hidden chamber containing a cypress. It represents man's interaction with nature, going on a journey from a closed area with no vegetation to the full borders along the outside, planted with colourful and aromatic Mediterranean plants, including *Dodonaea viscosa* 'Purpurea', *Carissa macrocarpa* and *Jasminum azoricum*.



09 RE-LIVE *Carmen Guerrero Mostazo and Andrea Graña*

SPANISH DUO Carmen Guerrero Mostazo and Andrea Graña focused on the history of the Mediterranean landscape, especially that of Sicily, for their garden. Gabion baskets filled with stone frame a path of black volcanic dust and piles of rocks planted with indigenous plants. The inspiration was traces of past earthquakes found on the island, with the message that after disaster there is life and hope.



10 HORTUS SALIS *Alejandro O'Neill*

SALT HAS BEEN an integral part of Mediterranean and Sicilian culture for centuries, and is the inspiration for this piece by Uruguayan-French designer Alejandro O'Neill. It represents the salt flats near the ancient site of Mozia, with mounds of salt and a central pool, with a bridge only accessible, like the salt flats, when the water level drops. It also showcases salt-tolerant planting such as *Teucrium* and *Tamarix*.



11 WHERE THE LIZARDS TAKE THEIR REST *Alfio Bonanno*

Alfio Bonanno

ARTIST ALFIO BONANNO was born in Sicily, but moved when young and now lives in Copenhagen. He specialises in site-specific work and was asked to return to Sicily to create two outdoor artworks and an indoor exhibition for the festival. In this piece, he investigates a sense of personal memory, using old spent grapevines from the local land. ○

VISITOR INFO

Radicepura Garden Festival, Via Fogazzaro n. 19, 95014 Giarre, Catania, Sicily, Italy. Runs until 21 October; open every day, 10am-7pm. www.radicepurafestival.com

NEAREST AIRPORT:

Flights available from London, Bristol and Manchester to Catania-Fontanarossa International Airport.

WHERE TO STAY:

Donna Carmela – chic country boutique hotel also owned by the Faro family, with restaurant and pool. www.donnacarmela.com

Kepos Etna Relais – small spa resort on the slopes of Mount Etna with great views and designer touches. www.keposetnarelais.com

GARDENS TO VISIT:

Go to www.grandigiardini.it to find details of local gardens to visit, including Giardino di San Giuliano and Casa Pennisi.

NURSERY APPOINTMENTS:

Visit the Piante Faro showroom of 5,000 cultivars, or book to tag large, mature specimens on the nursery, like those used on projects by Sarah Eberle FSGD and Tom Stuart-Smith MSGD. www.piantefaro.com/en/