IT'S TIME TO SHAKE THINGS UP

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MONOCLE

INSIDE: REWILD THE CITY CLEAN UP IN BUSINESS FIX, DON'T THROW TALK MORE GROW YOUR OWN FOREST

M A to F **AFFAIRS:** Asia's new generation of politicians **BUSINESS:** *Keep on trucking* **CULTURE:** Nature's fluffiest film stars
DESIGN: *Why modernists have never lost their cool* **ENTERTAINING:** Recipes for success **FASHION:** *Brands that don't outsource*

Let's Do It Better

Simple plans and wise shifts that will help you tread a little lighter, save some energy – and be happier.

Your Monocle Checklist — 2021

1. **Think provenance**
   Care about the maker ☑
2. **Be a good consumer**
   Buy less, buy better ☑
3. **Sustain real debate**
   And get off social media ☑
4. **Tread lightly**
   Mend, reuse and cherish ☑
5. **Lend a hand**
   And look after seniors ☑

Mobility mavericks

Chefs go country

Simple solutions

Retail gets kinder

Kiosks in the news

UK £7 USD $14 GER €12 CHF 13
DKK 129.95 ESP €12 BENELUX €12 JPY ¥2,200(+tax)
AUD $16.00(sea) SGD $19.90(w/get) CAD $19.00(air) ITA €12
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+ i **WELCOME MAT** The hotels in Reykjavík, Florence and Bali awaiting your arrival **NATURE CALL** Companies putting down rural roots **INVENTORY** From massage pants to banana cases, Japanese products that might just change your life

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DESIGN

REWILDING/GLOBAL

Concrete jungles

As urbanites the world over seek to nurture a little nature in their cities, we travel to Singapore, Copenhagen and Beirut to visit three projects with rewilding at their heart.

Edited by *Nolan Giles*

All of us pine for nature sometimes. Even the most impassioned city lover would agree that world's best urban environments are the ones that can provide a little taste of the wild. It's wilderness that best sustains the flora and fauna that we need to better enjoy our lives. Yet in many cities, developers went too far in creating concrete sprawls that neglected the importance of real nature – and the results can be depressing. But, thankfully, there are solutions arising today to reverse the damage. And they reach far beyond superficial man-made efforts.

The most interesting of these is the simple reintroduction of patches of wilderness, otherwise known as "rewilding". In dense tarmac-laden cities, however, this is a task that's easier said than done. Which brings us to the green-fingered entrepreneurs, designers and architects who we have highlighted over the following pages. With the noble aim of bringing wilderness to the city and providing biodiversity with its best shot to succeed, their innovative solutions are deserving of our appreciation. — (M)

PHOTOGRAPHER: *Maria Klenner*

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(**1**) Pistachio trees ready to be planted (**2**) Sirène Abiad weeding (**3**) Project members Abiad (on left) and Dana Harakeh

1.
Where a community is in bloom
Beirut, Lebanon

Those who walked along the banks of the Beirut river before 1968 would have found people fishing and picnicking beneath its pine and pistachio trees. But a government decision that year to encase the river in a concrete bed has since led to decades of environmental and social degradation. "The river became a no-man's land and a site of all sorts of abuses as a result," says Lebanese environmental architect and forest-maker Adib Dada. "Waste was dumped in it: raw sewage, industrial waste and even a crocodile that must have been someone's pet. It completely disconnected the community from this river."

For Beirut-born Dada, exploring a means to stop this pollution and heal riverside communities became a pet project, something he sought to tackle through his sustainably minded architecture studio The Other Dada. The Beirut-based firm's green ambitions were bolstered in 2019 thanks to a collaboration with

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Zürich-based entrepreneur Elise van Middelem. Her organisation, Sugi, sources funding via online donations for rewilding efforts in cities across the globe.

Seeking a location to pilot Sugi's first project, Van Middelem reached out to Dada to see whether it would be a fit for his river-revitalisation efforts. Dada was keen, inspired by Sugi's unique approach to rewilding, which draws upon the Miyawaki method. This Japanese-developed planting method can result in biodiverse, wild native forests growing 10 times faster and 30 times denser, while absorbing more pollution, than most forests that have been planted conventionally.

Taking to the task with gusto, Dada trained in the method with Shubhendu Sharma, a Miyawaki master whose work had initially inspired Van Middelem to launch her organisation, and the first Sugi-funded rewilding project began.

Over two phases, on an urban landfill adjacent to the river, Dada's team of 15 volunteers planted 500 sq m with 2,000 trees and shrubs from 17 native plant varieties. The project, called Beirut's Riverless Forest, was inaugurated in 2019 and its effects have been dramatic. The forest has begun to fulfil some of the ecosystem services typically supplied by the river. Groundwater has been recharged, flood risk diminished, air pollution reduced and air temperatures regulated.

Importantly, Riverless Forest has brought people back to this once-neglected patch of the city. "The riverbanks used to be such a great social space and people are now coming to this spot once again in order to engage in planting and maintenance activities," says Dada.

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Through this community, more projects have been able to flourish in Beirut, with volunteers from the first project working with Dada, Sugi and the municipal government rewilding an area called Zouk Mosbeh. The project, which began in 2020, focuses on a triangular strip of road reserve that's adjacent to the country's polluting electricity plant. It is hoped that the aptly named Power Plant Forest will equal the effect of the Riverless Forest by healing a degraded landscape, reducing pollution and rebuilding a community. — NM

PHOTOGRAPHERS: *Maria Klenner, Jan Søndergaard*

2.
Where sustainability is on top
SLA, Copenhagen

When it comes to greening our cities, the term "rewilding" isn't one that sits well with the team at SLA, a Copenhagen firm that has become a global go-to for bringing nature into urban areas. "Everything we bring into this city is new, so if it's nature, it's a man-made nature; if it's wilderness, it's a new wilderness," says SLA founder Stig Andersson, who joins partners Mette Skjold and Rasmus Astrup to discuss the matter with MONOCLE. We meet atop one of the firm's best-known projects: the green rooftop park on the uniquely designed power plant-cum-ski slope, Copenhill. Here is possibly the most concrete example of the trio's man-made "city nature". — NSG

Tell us about nature on Copenhill.
RASMUS ASTRUP: The core element here is to spread biodiversity. The key consideration with our planting was to ensure that birds would eat seeds and small berries and spread them, so that the birds are moving the biodiversity around the site. Recently we discovered a species of bird here that prefers high hills, so that was pretty amazing. The bird knew that this was an artificial hill but also knew that this hill still provides it with what it needs.

How does SLA operate as a team?
METTE SKJOLD: We have people in the office from a wide range of institutions in the Nordic countries and beyond, including those from architecture schools and landscape-architecture graduates, as well as horticulturists and people with a wide range of technical expertise. We have a team of biologists working on environmental issues and we have anthropologists and sociologists who are working with the added social-value elements.

How helpful is nature in forming social value?
STIG ANDERSSON: We have four issues that we believe work together in the way city nature performs best. One is social; then aesthetic; the third is biological diversity; and the last is the physical part, dealing with climate, pollution and so on.

So aesthetics are a key principle?
SA: This work is about beauty because humans admire nature and it makes us feel good. A walk in the forest puts you in a better mood. So when we are working with providing new nature, we need it to help fulfil wonderful lives for other people and not be there to just improve the climate and so on.

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"This work is about beauty because humans admire nature and it makes us feel good. A walk in the forest puts you in a better mood"

(1) Riverless Forest next to the Beiruti neighborhood Sin el-Fil (2) Municipal worker digging a whole to plant a tree (3) More than 700 saplings were planted in the Power Plant Forest (4) Project founder Adib Dada (5) Mette Skjold (on left), Rasmus Astrup and Stig Andersson on Copenhill

Where can we see a successful project in full effect?
MS: We won a competition five years ago to transform a roundabout and residential street in the east of Copenhagen. It was a pilot project on climate adaptation and rainwater management. We removed two thirds of the paved area and rather than adding convex structures to move rainwater away from the street, we created a project that embraced the rainwater, even in extreme conditions. We added more than 30,000 plant species and 578 trees.

You receive commissions from the private sector. Why is there a commercial demand for your work?
RA: When we worked on the Novo Nordisk headquarters in Denmark, we provided storm-water management and increased the biodiversity. They wanted something to show that, as a brand, they believe in biodiversity and they were able to become a better company. The biggest assets they have, like most companies, are employees, so they have to take care of them. Today innovation takes place outside. When you see a butterfly or bird and you talk more informally, ideas really do happen. Our work has a major business case in cities too, which also are competing against each other for talent and to be the most liveable, the most pleasant and the most sustainable. Our work is something that everybody needs – and our clients are willing to pay for it.

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(**1**) Leonard Ng
(**2**) Walking bridge crossing Kallang river
(**3**) Smooth-coated otter, an inhabitant of the pond garden
(**4**) Path to the river
(**5**) Stepping stones are a popular feature with families

PHOTOGRAPHER: *Marc Tan*

"Trees have matured, the meanders have stabilised and wildlife has colonised and found its rhythm"

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Where water encourages life
Bishan, Singapore

A meandering waterway flows through Bishan, an area in central Singapore characterised by high-density residential blocks. When MONOCLE visits, families are taking their shoes and socks off to play in the water, wading to visit little islands or observing the insects and animals ashore. This was once a concrete canal that separated the residents from the park but it's now a multifunctional rewilded waterway; a green and porous infrastructure with benefits to the environment and the community at a low cost to the city.

The Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park is a 3km-long integration of nature that was born from the government's Active, Beautiful and Clean (ABC) strategy to encourage the community to appreciate water in Singapore. "The first thing my children do when they get to the park is to run into the river," says Leonard Ng, country director at Ramboll Singapore and country market director at Ramboll Studio Dreiseitl for Middle East and Asia-Pacific region, the designers behind the 62-hectare project. "They are playing yet learning about the value of water. We want to encourage the next generation to protect our waters and I believe that Bishan park has served this purpose," says Ng. He adds that 10 years have passed since the park was built and it has now reached its mature form. "Trees have matured, the meanders have stabilised and wildlife has colonised and found its rhythm."

When Ng's team initially pitched the the project, they were aided by being able to show how costs could be saved. The idea that the park would facilitate a small stream during dry periods but extend over a much bigger flat plain during storm events caused by climate change was smarter than an expensive widening of the existing concrete channel. "There was a barrier between where people live and where people play," he says. "And we used wild nature to stitch that landscape together. The most valuable attribute in the natural river is constant change." He says that when dry, the stream is 10 metres wide, giving the community access to the parkland. But during a storm the river can expand to become more than 100 metres wide, only to recede in a few hours.

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Thanks to the project's success, the past few years have seen a doubling of the number of annual visitors to Bishan park. But the beginning of 2021 saw some heavy rainfall in Singapore, which meant that the concept was put to the test. "It was the heaviest rain in 30 years in Singapore but the river did what we designed it to do," says Ng. "By holding the water back, the river allowed for the downstream city infrastructure to cope better."

When MONOCLE visits, the park is resplendent in tropical sunshine and onlookers watch a dragonfly as it lays eggs under a well-placed boulder. Butterflies gather around the woven reed and children are playing by the landscaped riverbank. It's the design of the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio park that has made it a balanced ecosystem and one of the city's most beloved playgrounds.

"We didn't bring in the dragonflies but we provided places for them to nest," says Ng. "After the dragonflies came the birds and, over time, the ecosystem forms a beautiful balance. And that attracts humans. The wildlife has improved the liveability in the area: there are lower levels of illness and the property values have increased." — LIF