



THE ART OF THE LAND

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER ANDREA SANCHEZ
APPROACHES HER PROJECTS LIKE LIVING ARTWORKS,
INTENSELY ENTWINED WITH HER CONNECTION TO
NATURE

Words: Danni Landa Photography: Ana Lui

Love at first sight is real. It happens when you look into the soul of another living being and see a deep pool where the reflection of your true self is staring back at you. Landscape designer Andrea Sanchez knows this feeling well. She is an artist whose medium is plants, with canvases that are gardens – when she first encounters a tree, herb, bush, grass or vine, she instinctively knows if it is destined to become a part one of her projects.

Born in Concepción in the south of Chile, Sanchez grew up close to nature and was nurtured by a family fixated on creating beauty. “My parents and grandmother always surrounded themselves with beauty, whether it was man-made or natural,” she says. Art had always been the thing that nourished her soul the most and Sanchez naturally thought she would grow up to pursue a career in the arts. But at the age of 18, having just finished high school, she came across an article in a magazine about an English landscape designer. It opened up a whole new pathway and by the time she finished reading, Sanchez had her life’s focus decided. “Art and gardens are a good symbiosis,” she says. “It seemed perfect. You can apply so many things to landscaping – art, colour, photography, composition and nature.”

Sanchez studied landscape design in Chile before starting a German language course, with a very specific reason in mind. “I wanted to do postgraduate studies in Germany because they had excellent schools in that field,” she explains. She lived in Bonn for two years, perfecting her language skills, and just as she applied for a Master’s degree, she was offered a job in Ibiza that required a German-speaking landscape designer. “I came for a year to see what the island was like,” she says. “I’m still here 20 years later. The island calls you and here you stay.”

She remembers landing in Ibiza for the first time and immediately being spellbound by the wildness of the landscape. “By then, I had been living in a city for so long. First Santiago and then Bonn,” she says. “When I came to Ibiza, it felt like chaos – the island is very spontaneous. After Germany, it was just amazing.” She arrived in February, when the Ibiza landscape is glowing with almond blossoms and wildflowers, and started work in April. Through her work at a large local garden centre, she met her husband, Ricardo Jarpa, and the pair launched landscaping design company, Laterna Gardens, in 2004. “Ricardo does the marketing and strategy, and runs the business, while I do the design,” she says of their partnership. “He’s always respectful of my vision. We understand each other.”

Each garden design always starts with the people who will use the area. Before she even thinks about the composition or what plants may work, Sanchez gets to know her clients. “I try to see how they work as a family or a couple, and find out what their intentions are for the use of the space. Then I look at their taste, the architecture and the environment. It’s quite personal.” Her passion for art has informed much of the way she envisions a space. Where others might see a lawn, a tree or a garden bed, Sanchez sees shapes, texture, colour and depth. “A garden is like a little universe. I treat it like an installation.” She describes her work as designing emotional landscapes.

Inspiration also comes from daily drives around the island, which allow Sanchez to compose her thoughts against the background of Ibiza’s extraordinarily beautiful landscapes. Her childhood in Chile also provides a scaffold for her creativity. “I had such happy childhood connected to nature, and I’m always observing and learning from my children,” she says. “Gardens should always have a playfulness. I’m always thinking about how a child will view the garden I’m working on.” For Sanchez, children are the best litmus test because they are always open to surprise and joy. “I try to replicate that. We all have the capacity for it, but sometimes, it gets lost.”

The playfulness in her work is what caught the attention of international property developer, Anton Bilton, who first met Sanchez when he hired her to redesign the garden of his private Ibiza home. Impressed with the harmony she’d achieved within the design and the infrastructure on his own property, Bilton enlisted Sanchez as head landscape designer on his latest project, Sabina, comprised of approximately 50 luxury homes designed by some of the biggest names in international architecture – a confluence of creative minds, hand-picked for their ingenuity, skill and style.







Like all good artistic patrons, Bilton gave Sanchez complete creative freedom. “The project as a whole has such good intention,” she says. “It’s ambitious but it’s also very generous. I have a lot of freedom in my work. It’s a real gift that my clients trust me.” The ethos of the project is based on ideals of community and connection, and Sanchez and her team are in charge of creating gardens for each home, in addition to the communal zones. The first phase of the project alone consists of approximately 30,000 square metres of green space.

It took two years of planning before a single plant was brought into Sabina where a team of 30 people installed, and continue to care for, the gardens. Sanchez and her team started with the common areas while the first homes were under construction. “I base myself within the architecture, looking at how it works, the mood and how the interior relates to the exterior,” she says. “Later, the assemblage is more organic.” In the case of Sabina, the brief was to give the urban streets a uniquely campo feel. “I think that everyone can learn something from this project – from the architecture and art to the landscape, there is so much in it,” she says.

Robust and wise centenarian olive trees, towering pencil cypresses, a yellow flowering tipuana tipu tree, vibrant tropical plants, delicate white and blue flowers, vivid pink blooms and aromatic plants grow harmoniously alongside indigenous shrubs, Mediterranean herbs and organic fruit and veggie patches across the estate. “The idea was to create imperfection and a relaxed unification through the landscaping,” Sanchez explains.

Design in any field is about flexibility as much as it is about good planning, and she estimates that about 80-percent of what she had planned has come to fruition. “Often, it’s the plants that dictate the changes,” she says. “I might plan to put something in one place, but once it’s there, you can clearly see it saying: ‘I don’t want to be here, put me over there!’ Move it two metres and there’s an immediate connection.”

Such is her devotion to finding the perfect tree or plant for a project, Sanchez will personally travel to mainland Spain or Italy, drawing on her natural-born intuition when searching for ‘the one’. “When I’m looking for a tree, I know straight away when I’ve found it,” she says. Her deep kinship with the natural world continues beyond the selection process when the tree arrives in Ibiza. “The moment of planting is very emotional for me. It’s an intense moment. There is transference between the tree and humans. Trees have long lives. They suffer, they know things, they have memory and they are alive, like we are. When they are happy, they thrive and that is why we need to care for them.”

Sanchez’s emotional connection to her chosen medium is evident in her demeanour when she is talking about the natural world. Softly animated, with sparkling eyes and a tender smile, she is a painter sparked by a new method, a poet moved to tears by a line, or a musician lost in the beauty of the composition. Her living artworks composed of nature’s gifts are a legacy that will continue to transform as they thrive and grow beneath the Ibiza sun.