



Picture of a boat known as "Trajinera" taken in a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, during a symposium on biodiversity and gastronomy, in Mexico City. — AFP photos



Venezuelan chef Maria Fernanda Di Giacobbe cooks during a symposium on biodiversity and gastronomy.



View of a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco.



Picture of a boat known as "Trajinera" taken in a water channel amid the floating gardens of Xochimilco.

Star chefs in Mexico to defend biodiversity

Star chefs from around the world gathered in Mexico City's ancient floating gardens for a symposium on saving the world's threatened biodiversity, a bleak subject they peppered with breaks to savor the local cuisine. Joan Roca of Spain, Michel Bras of France and Gaston Acurio of Peru were among the big-name chefs who took part in the event Tuesday at Xochimilco, a UNESCO World Heritage Site criss-crossed with natural canals and artificial islands first created by the Aztecs.

Munching on hand-made tortillas stuffed with organic beans and quesadillas made from local corn, participants used the idyllic setting to tackle a grim problem: the threats that climate change, industrial agriculture and overexploitation pose to the world's plant and animal life. "I believe that solidarity is in a chef's DNA, along with the desire to create a commitment to preserve the environment and biodiversity," said Roca, whose restaurant El Celler de Can Roca has twice taken top place on the prestigious list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants.

The chefs were in town to pick the winner of the Basque Culinary World Prize, a 100,000-euro award for food-related projects that have made a positive difference beyond the kitchen. Roca presided over the jury

that named this year's winner on Monday: Colombian chef Leonor Espinosa of the restaurant LEO in Bogota, who is known for sourcing local ingredients and giving back to the communities that supply them. That was also a key theme at the symposium. To illustrate the point, participants toured the lettuce and cactus fields of Xochimilco's famous "chinampas," artificial islands created with age-old agricultural techniques used by the Aztecs and other Mesoamerican peoples.

The chinampas are one of the last reminders of how the Aztecs lived 500 years ago at the time the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the Americas, when Mexico City was mostly covered in water.

'Urban stain'

Today, the city has become a sprawling urban area of more than 20 million people. Xochimilco is one of the area's last vestiges of small-scale agriculture amid what the Mexican academic Refugio Rodriguez called "the growing urban stain of the Mexican capital." Seeking to help revive a more sustainable kind of agriculture to supply the city's food, some Mexican chefs have started sourcing fresh, organic ingredients straight from the chi-

nampas. They include the likes of Enrique Olvera, owner of the famed restaurant Pujol, and Ricardo Munoz Zurita, of "Azul y Oro."

Munoz Zurita, whom Time magazine has called a "prophet" of preserving culinary tradition, called for a return to niche local ingredients such as native Mexican corn, instead of the mass-produced basket of produce that dominates the world's supermarket aisles. "We're going to be the ambassadors of critically endangered products. We have to start cooking with them so people don't forget they exist," he said. To get to the event, which was held under a large thatch hangar, participants ventured to an artificial island by boat, a trip of about 30 minutes.

The symposium was sponsored by the Basque Culinary Center, a gastronomic university born off the back of a revolution in Spanish cuisine epitomized by the Basque country's plethora of Michelin-starred restaurants and by Ferran Adria, the father of molecular gastronomy. — AP

Art in the garden: Placing the right work in the right spot

For many landscape designers and homeowners, a garden isn't complete without the right art. But how do you find the right spot for a piece of outdoor art and choose the plants to complement it? The first step is finding a work that really speaks to you, and then "allow the art to help define the landscape," says landscape architect Edmund Hollander. He recommends working with an artist or gallery, when possible, to create a relationship between artwork and garden.

"It's really not so different from the relationship between a house and its surrounding landscape," he says. Susan Lowry, coauthor with Nancy Berner of "Private Gardens of the Bay Area" (The Monacelli Press, October 2017), says art in a garden should enhance its surroundings. "Scale, texture and light all play off the object, and there is also an emotional content that influences how we see the garden itself," she says.

Less is more, she cautions: "We have seen many a garden ruined by too many extraneous voices jumbled into the frame." The most common mistake when placing art in gardens, Hollander warns, is "sticking a work where there's too much other stuff. It's as if a museum hung a painting on a wallpapered wall instead of on a white one." So experts recommend that works be placed against quiet backdrops like evergreens, hedges or lawns.

Karen Daubmann, associate vice president for exhibitions and public engagement at the New York Botanical Garden, has helped design plantings around works by glass artist Dale Chihuly and others. The principles for selecting and showing art in a home garden are similar, she says.

"It's nice to go for something as a larger focal point - something you can see from your window and enjoy all year round, and then some smaller works that you only discover up close," she says. "And when you're decided where to place something, don't forget to look up. It's a nice surprise to look up and see a pergola, chandelier or lantern."



This undated photo provided by the Glass House and the Morgan Art Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) shows Robert Indiana's "One Through Zero," left, at the Glass House in New Canaan, Conn.

Most important, Daubmann says, is to choose art you really love. "Chances are, if you're placing it in a garden you have designed and planted yourself, it will work, because it's the same aesthetic," she says. Keep in mind when and from where the work will be viewed. From the kitchen window? The living room? If you'll be viewing it at night, consider lighter colors, she says.

"White glass or white flowers make for a great moonlight garden, while dark blues will tend to get lost in the evening,"

Daubmann says. "A mossy, shaded garden can be spiced up quite a lot with light colored art." And the artwork doesn't have to be expensive. "I sometimes find wonderful pieces in antique shops or at barn sales that really spark my imagination," Daubmann says.

Hilary Lewis, chief curator and creative director at The Glass House, Philip Johnson's iconic house and surrounding landscape and structures in New Canaan, Connecticut, helps plan the installations there. She says works should be visible from



This undated photo provided by HOLLANDER design/Landscape Architects shows a sculpture by artist Robert Indiana in a residential garden on the east end of Long Island in New York.

various parts of the property, should feel like an extension of the landscape, and should draw people in.

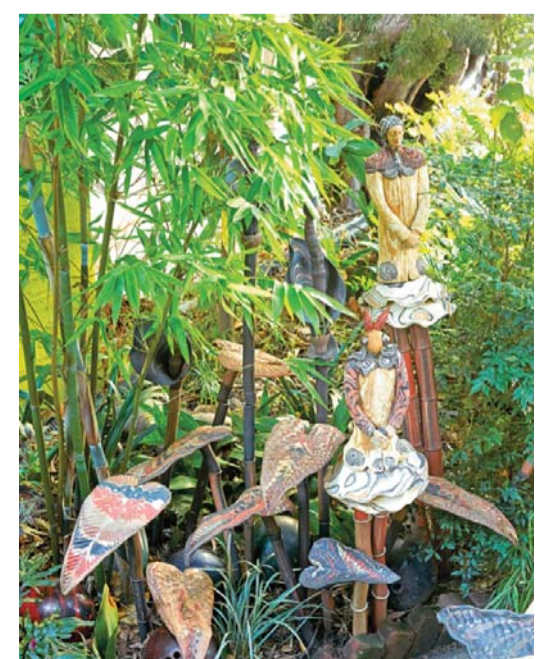
For inspiration, experts suggest visiting sculpture gardens, museums or botanical gardens. "There are lots of sculpture gardens of all kinds around these days, and the combination of landscape and art, when done right, can be very inspiring," Hollander says. — AP



This undated photo provided by The Monacelli Press shows "Per Adriano" by sculptor Igor Mitoraj in a residential garden on the east end of Long Island in New York. — AP photos



This undated photo provided by The Monacelli Press shows Viola Frey's "The Three Graces" in the Rena Bransten Garden, a private residential garden in San Francisco.



This undated photo shows sprites and colorful leaf-shapes atop bamboo-like stems are interspersed with the plants in the Marcia Donahue Garden in Berkeley, Calif.