

# LIVING ARCHITECTURE

Il Nature's landscape designer Alexandre Grivko has undertaken a bold experiment – applying parametric architectural design to the plant compositions of Les Jardins d'Étretat

During the Renaissance gardens were organised according to precise architectural rules. Leon Battista Alberti believed that gardens should be exposed to the sun and the wind and reflect the ideas of unity underlying architectural structures. While the great Italian Donato Bramante designed the Belvedere garden for the Pope, French architect Louis-Martin Berthault created the garden at Malmaison for the empress Joséphine. History knows many such cases when architects turned landscape designers. But what about today? What if a contemporary architect like Zaha Hadid designed a garden? Such were the questions besieging Alexandre Grivko, Il Nature's art director and designer, who is responsible for around 500 large-scale private and public gardens worldwide. After working as a landscape architect for 25 years, he grew increasingly intent on pushing horticulture in new aesthetic directions. One key signpost was Vito di Bari's 'Neo-Futuristic City Manifesto' (2007), the bible of contemporary urban architects, which advocates combining art, technology, nature and ethical values. A comfortable human life is only possible, the architect argued, in just such an imaginative, well-maintained environment. Les Jardins d'Étretat in Normandy, France, have become Alexandre's testing ground, promoting these principles since 2016.

The sinuous, futuristic line of Grivko's plantings has an architectural quality. That is no coincidence. He has always admired the pioneering vision of the late Zaha Hadid, in particular her universal approach to parametric modelling – that is to say the application of algorithms and special software to manipulate equations in the creation of complex architectural forms. This Renaissance woman developed a creative method that can be applied to everything from furniture and shoes to sports arenas. And now, it seems, to gardens. Grivko employs the technique not merely to accurately map overall landscaping; unlike building materials, plants are both inherently fragile and continually changing according to season and their growth cycle. So mathematical principles are also used to gauge the height, width and volume of flora, estimate their future proportions and develop innovative plant-care systems.

The Étretat complex is divided into seven gardens that tumble romantically down to the shore. What is extraordinary is that computer programming (so often seen as a soulless and robotic affair) underpins a rich sensory experience that appeals to the emotions and produces a very pacifying, harmonious effect.

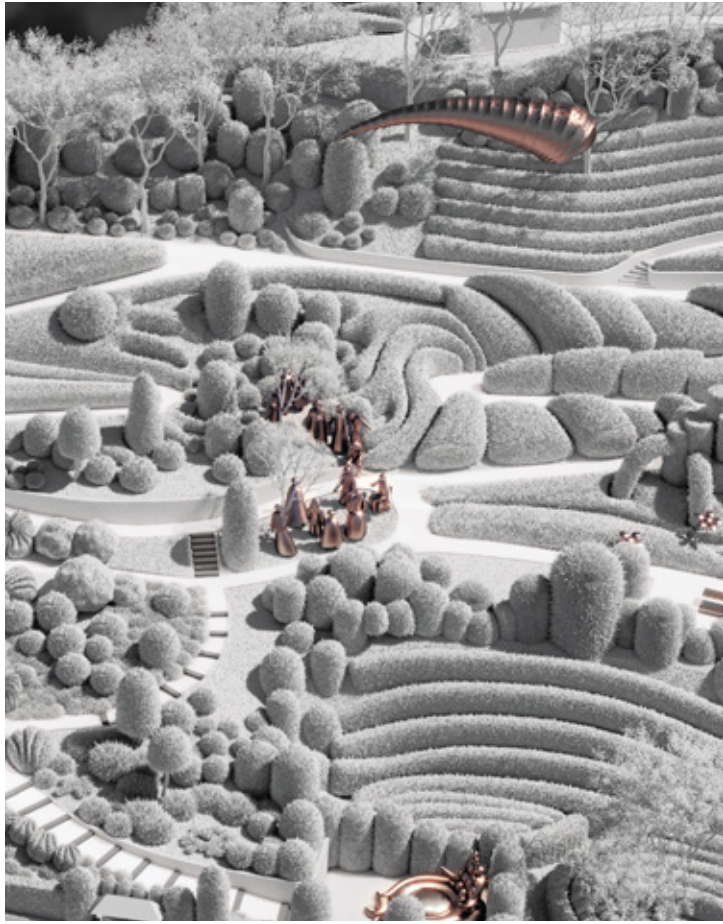
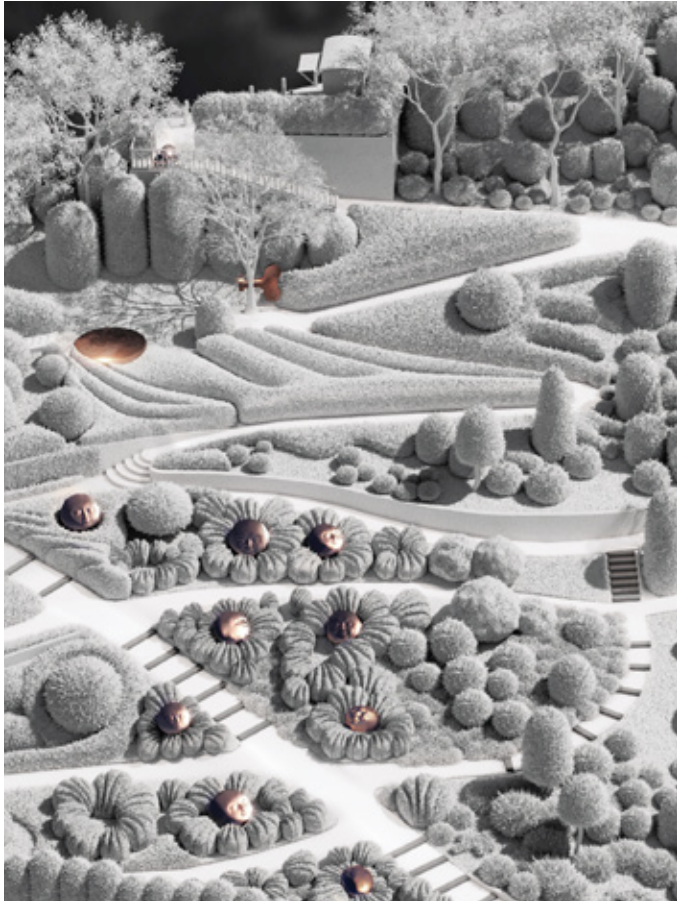
In the labyrinthine Jardin La Manche, large trimmed plants, many with silvery leaves, evoke the roaring surf of the English Channel below. The Jardin d'Emotions alludes to Marie-Antoinette's historic oyster farm, once sited at the bottom of a nearby cliff. Calling to mind the creatures' underwater terrain, box hedging has been sculpted – with computer-aided mathematical precision – into mollusc-like forms. Meanwhile, the Jardin d'Aval offers a cybertastic riff on *Alice in Wonderland*, while its hoops of yew mimic the stone arches standing sentinel along the Normandy coastline.

Les Jardins d'Étretat pay homage to their indigenous setting, their royal, artistic and thespian past and their links to Impressionism. But Grivko believes that this futuristic cross-pollination of art, cutting-edge technology and (let's not forget) some 150,000 evergreen plants provides the ideal template for a pervasively higher quality of life for all and paves the way to a better, orchid-strewn future □

*Les Jardins d'Étretat. Visit [etretatgarden.fr](http://etretatgarden.fr)*

Trimmed plant compositions are the building blocks of green architecture in the Jardin La Manche





OPPOSITE Computer models showing different zones of Les Jardins d'Étretat. Note that art installations have been picked out in copper. THIS PAGE TOP Fanciful yew hoops against green 'waves' at Jardin La Manche echo the stone arches that punctuate the Normandy coastline. BELOW LEFT At Jardin d'Amont, nature, art and architecture work in concert. RIGHT Tightly terraced box hedging evokes cliffs

