



GREEN THUMB

RICK ECKERSLEY

The transformative power of plants has fascinated this renowned landscape designer all his life.

What attracted you to gardening?

I was raised on a grazing property in western Victoria and I think I started gardening to cure the boredom. I'd make cubbyhouses and create little gardens around them from the age of about eight.

When did you start to see it as a career? In my early 20s I worked as a volunteer in Africa and Vanuatu, and got involved in planting productive gardens. It was a way to help the locals be more self-sufficient. I learned a lot about the

transformative power of gardening. When I came back to Melbourne, I studied horticulture at Burnley College.

When did you start your business?

In 1976 I set up Eco Landscape Design. I'm a greenie, full stop. I wanted to say 'eco' in my business name, although nobody knew what it was back then. I was in practice with Lisa Stafford for many years, before launching Eckersley Garden Architecture (EG-A) in 2010 with long-time colleagues Scott Leung and Myles Broad.

What's your design philosophy?

A well-designed garden invites you in. It contains visual and sensual stimulation and takes you on a journey. A garden has to touch your senses: it's like good art or architecture. I also think that gardens should be friendly.

How do you achieve a friendly garden?

It has to do with designing on a human scale and manipulating the weather conditions. Make sure you include shade so you can eat outdoors when it's hot. Create shelter belts so you can stay outside when it's cool. For drizzly days, make sure you have cover outside, or a vista to the outdoors from the inside.

Why do you love green canopies?

The Italians get it right: I love the way they eat outdoors, under vines growing on simple structures. Whether it's a tree arbour or a creeper growing along a beam, a green canopy is stunning.

Can you name your favourite garden?

The Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne is as good as any garden I've seen in the world. And I love the work of Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, who integrated architecture with outdoor spaces.

What do you love about being in the garden? Gardening is a tonic, a therapy and a great form of exercise.

Always take time to smell the...

gums. My favourite tree is *Angophora costata*. It grows in wonderful shapes and has all the colours in the world in its trunk. It's just so beautiful. **H&G**
EG-A, Richmond, Victoria; e-ga.com.au.

RICK'S FAVOURITE...



Music to garden to I love the sound of birds and everything in the natural soundscape.



Gardening tool My little hand saw. I carry this with me all the time.



Plant *Ampelopsis*, part of the grapevine family. It has silvery leaves and lapis lazuli berries.

Produced by Elizabeth Wilson. Photography by Martina Gemmola (portrait), Jason Busch/bauersyndication.com.au (bird), Getty Images (saw, berries).