

Feature

# Kot Man-Ya garden of passion



● Former diplomat Marc Marengo talks about his focus in a new field

The garden of flowers created by former diplomat Marc Marengo at Les Canelles has some 250 types of Orchid, several varieties of Torch, an even bigger variety of Heliconia, Sexy Pink, Cigar, Rattle Snake and many other exotic flowers found in the world. It has natural streams and pathways made from thirty tons of macadam. The place is a garden in paradise.

Like the famous Charles Dickens, the British Novelist who died in 1870, once said, "the whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a

thing created is loved before it exists'.

This explains how Ambassador Marc MRM Marengo must have felt when he conceived the idea of starting a garden of flowers on his family property at Les Canelles, preceding the vegetables his family cultivated. He loved the inspiration even before he began to create a new and better gardening experience.

This beautiful garden which Mr. Marengo has spent eight years to make, very soon will no longer be a best-kept secret. As of next week everyone can visit this dream to experience the magic of being transported to your own slice of paradise. You leave the



real world at the gates and enter a lush tropical or rather Amazonian setting that is sure to take your breath away and ignite your imagination.

Plants have been selected for their uniqueness. Mr. Marengo says that some varieties have been brought in from America. To find some, Mr. Marengo says one must travel to the Amazon Jungle to see, for example his wide selections of *Heliconia*. His *Jade Vine* originating from the Philippines, represents love and luck and the *Self-Peeling Bananas*, with its erotic connotations is much loved by people who frequently drop by to visit.

During his overseas trips Mr. Marengo

would buy the plants, and have them transported to Seychelles.

After visiting the garden, if you choose to describe the place as a Garden of Eden, it definitely lives to the true meaning of Eden which is delight. Yes, it has more than one tree of life. When our journalist visited the garden she definitely felt relieved of her stress. It has plants of knowledge for every plant has a history. If you prefer to use the word paradise, it is synonym to the Garden of Eden. A guided tour of the area by Mr. Marengo's brother-in-law, our journalist found the place amazing. Although it involved going up and down to see the many

flowers she did not feel fatigue, although it felt good afterwards to gulp down a glass of fresh lime.

"I remember as a young child seeing my mother in her garden. She would get up very early and would head to not only her flowers but we also planted vegetables. My mother has lived on this property and my brothers and sisters and I were raised there. As a child therefore I always helped my mother in her garden. After we failed with 'lerouy', then I said why can't I try planting flowers? It was how I began to understand the passion of the garden", Mr. Marengo says.

*Kot Man-Ya* is a kind of evolving thing. When Mr. Marengo returned to Seychelles he spent 80

percent of his weekends planning out his garden. After eight years he now sees the fruits of his labour. He is proud that he has created such a beautiful garden that he thought it would be a waste to keep the place as his own secret garden. He decided that it would be best to share the experience with other people.

"I have made this garden in such a unique way that it is also an attraction to visitors to our islands. Here in Seychelles we lack this kind of charm for our visitors whom we so often complain would rather stay in their 5-star hotels than visit our islands", Mr. Marengo noted.

Mr. Marengo was the person who chaired the committee for Eco-Tourism Strategy therefore

nature entices him to have this fervor or dedication that enables him to seek out initiatives that combine environment with tourism. "At first I only wanted to plant flowers which during the eight years I have sold to hotels and other establishments. The revenue I made I re-invested in the business as I was in employment with the Vice-President Office, I had a salary coming in. But now that I am no longer employed and I have other projects similar to this one at hand it is necessary that I turn my garden towards the public and visitors so that it generates more money", Mr. Marengo says.

Being the Chairman of the Eco-tourism

to his grandfather, who later passed it on to his only daughter, Mr. Marengo's mother who passed away four years ago.

His mother divided the land into six plots to give each of her children their share. Mr. Marengo's brothers and sisters have agreed to allow their brother to use part of their land to expand the garden, hence, the name *Kot Man-Ya*, their mother's nick-name. Eventually, they would get together to create a family business. Mr. Marengo adds that part of the profits that he will make with this garden he will also use it for his other projects he has planned for his native district, Anse Royale.



Society of Seychelles, Mr. Marengo will be developing another garden at Mont Plaisir. The aim is to encourage people to plant flowers or vegetables and they will have a spot (or a cooperative) where they will be able to sell their produce. The society wants to get as close as possible to the community. With all his projects that would keep him going, Mr. Marengo says he will be based at the Orion Mall.

Other than buy the flowers when he travels Mr. Marengo also order through the Internet. Mr. Marengo says that as a diplomat he has and continues to love his country and through his flowers, he develops a kind of rapport with people, and his mind is enriched with positive thinking.

His garden was also his pressure cooker to relieve the heaviness or stress he felt when he was working as Special Advisor in the Vice-President's office for the past eight years.

He walks several kilometers in his garden while tending to his flowers, Mr. Marengo never feels tired when compared to when he was at work or is outside of his garden. *Kot Man-Ya* also brings together the Marengo family. Mr. Marengo plants on two acres of land which part of it belongs to his brothers and sisters. The property originally belonged

to his grandfather, who later passed it on to his only daughter, Mr. Marengo's mother who passed away four years ago.

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When he officially opens his garden for public viewing Mr. Marengo says he will not sell any plant for the time being. He does not feel threatened by competitors or the shops which import flowers, Mr. Marengo says it is good that people love flowers. "Holland, which is a country that has a lot of flowers still say that flowers are never enough. So it is fine by me that more people are now loving flowers", Mr. Marengo says.

He does all the planting and pruning, and he points out that he has foremost a passion, which included having lots of patience before he could see the flowers grow and bloom. Now aged 53, Mr. Marengo has conquered the world, the pictures that reveal the secrets of his journeys adorn the house where his mother lived, the house which he is slowly transforming into a museum. He plans to also turn another house found on the property into a place where visitors can relax and sip drinks.

Even after spending 31 years in government, it is too early for Mr. Marengo to consider that he has retired and it definitely isn't over until it is really over, he says. "I will go through it until the last day", he says.

He has spent 16 years overseas, since eight years ago he has come home to roost.

But he says that even if he has changed course now it does not mean that his mind does not work anymore when it comes to his experience in the diplomatic circle and his political belief, we all have to contribute one way or the other. "My garden is one step forward for the tourism industry. It is the small things that you do that make the difference", Mr. Marengo says. He is not only opening a garden for viewing but he is preparing brochures that provide the details giving the names of the flowers, their origins, descriptions and medicinal qualities if they have any. It would be good information for the younger visitors such as school children.

The secrets of the garden lie in its location. It is found in a valley, where it is mostly middle altitude. It has natural water streams flowing everywhere which gives good moisture to the flowers. Mr. Marengo says he has tanks of natural water which he uses to flower the plants. He does not use any fertilizers, the plants take their course to grow in the most natural way. Nothing is wasted in the place, he feeds the leaves or plants which he does not need to the giant tortoises which he keeps in a pen, and he later on get the manure to feed the plants. It is a kind of eco-circle.

Mr. Marengo says like people say it is necessary to talk to flowers and he at times use bad languages to make sure they understand he wants them to bloom. "My flowers make me and my family happy. I will take this opportunity to tell others who have an idea, who want to develop a passion he/she has been having, work on your idea, step by step, brick by brick, rock by rock and day by day. Focus on it and eventually you will realize a talent and hopefully a dream", Mr. Marengo says.

He adds that his garden will keep him going until the fat lady sings. After that the garden will stay in the family for generations to come

