

CEREAL

In this volume, we explore the theme of **sustainability**, discuss architecture with **Tadao Ando**, and examine a framework for design with **Ilse Crawford**. We visit **Mexico City** to experience **Casa Luis Barragán** and **Pujol**, and escape to **Malibu** and **Montenegro**.

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Linda Rodin

NATURAL BEAUTY

Words: Jenny Bahn **Photos:** Justin Chung

Down a hallway, through a canary yellow door, Linda Rodin's apartment – her home for nearly 40 years – is a charming spectacle of the cherished. Framed portraits hang from walls painted a faded robin's egg blue. Plastic mannequin hands, forever frozen in place on a bureau, hold drapes of pearls. There are shell collections, bunny collections, shelves stacked with books. Everywhere the eye travels, a plant inevitably reaches into the frame. Pots, in lime ceramic and orange terracotta, hold sharp fingers of zebra cactus, wide palms of *Monstera*. Each room is a defiant response to creeping, minimalist hegemony, and a city rife with grey. It is a space unique to Rodin, filled like a treasure chest, and as tended as any garden.

Rodin's affinity for plants can perhaps be seen as a latent but inevitable gift. As the founder and former creative director of the eponymous Rodin skincare line, Rodin seems to have always been orbiting the world of botanicals. It was here in 2006, in her galley kitchen, that Rodin developed her first *Olio Lusso* recipe; cult fandom soon followed. Rodin began dealing in more direct interaction with plants just three years ago. While Rodin the line turned extractions of jasmine and neroli into liquid gold, Rodin the woman became increasingly keen on maintaining a menagerie of living specimens. If there is a connection between the two, it was subconscious, admits Rodin, but: "Plants and flowers and scents, I always loved all that."

Born and raised just outside Manhattan, Rodin grew up around seasonal greenery. The family yard was simple, but cared for. "My mother had beautiful roses planted randomly," Rodin recalls. "Rose bushes here and there. My father always had a tomato garden. We had forsythia. Bright yellow all over. It was very suburban, very Long Island, but there was always something growing." After moving to New York City in the late 1960s, Rodin set out on a happenstance journey that would lead her to much success as a fashion stylist. She went years without plants. Her intense love of flora, much like her career, was a bit of an accident.

"I was always seeing beautiful photographs of beautiful places, and thinking, 'Why can't I have a few plants?'" Rodin answered the query with one pot, then two. To her mild surprise, they thrived. She kept experimenting,

placing more plants around her home, honing her green thumb. "You have to listen and watch," she explains. "It's just trial and error. You just learn." The lush oasis that exists now is the result of those lessons. "I've overwatered a lot of plants. You can't water all your plants on the same day because they don't need the same amount of water. You can't just say, 'Oh, Saturday is plant day.' Well, Saturday might not be plant day for certain plants."

There have, naturally, been casualties along the way. "I give them a few weeks looking half dead until I admit they're not coming back to life, which is very sad because I try to take care of all of them." Replacements and additions are sourced at the Greenmarket in Union Square, by florists in Chinatown, and at the Flower District on 28th Street. "I go to those three places. I know the people that sell there. They tell me how to take care of the plants. More importantly, I listen."

While there might be plants for sale on every street corner, New York City is not in possession of a wealth of natural beauty, in Rodin's opinion. For true inspiration, she travels elsewhere. "I was just in Italy," Rodin tells me, "and I stayed in this beautiful hotel near Ravello. It was an old castle owned by some prince. There were sculptures mixed in with the trees. Bougainvillea crawling everywhere. A random kind of thing, you know. I don't like anything planned. I like haphazard. I love to look at formal gardens in a book, but I'd rather be some place that was a little less tame." I ask if she would ever consider trading in city life for a country garden. "Oh, yes," she enthuses, "but I don't know if I'd be very good at planting flowers outside, actually. I've never had the opportunity to try."

For now, Rodin continues to fashion her Chelsea apartment into her own private sanctuary. A self-professed homebody, she surrounds herself with the things she loves. From Winky, her silvery poodle, to the good humoured reserves of candy in her fridge, the things that enter this urban retreat are emblematic of Rodin herself – her plants included. Asked to pick a favourite, Rodin protests an impossible task: "I love all of it. I love weeds. Anything that's alive and growing."

