



Giardino Botanico – Fondazione André Heller

The story of the *Giardino Botanico* reads like a tale from a time long past.

Austrian Professor **Arturo Hruska**, born in 1880, dentist for the last Tsar and such renowned personalities such as **Sigmund Freud** or **Popes Pius XII** and **John XXIII**, was so impressed by the beauty and luminosity of Lake Garda that he bought a plot of land on the slopes of Monte Lavino and moved his practice there in 1903. At the same time, he began to create one of the most magical and biodiverse private gardens in Italy on an area of 10,000 m², which soon attracted people from all over the world interested in botany and earned him much recognition among experts (for example, the legendary Royal Botanic Society of London awarded him its Medal of Honour). Notable guests such as the exceptional actress **Eleonora Duse**, the poet **Gabriele D' Annunzio** sought inspiration there, as did **Winston Churchill**, who often retreated to paint in Hruska Park during his stays at the Grand Hotel Gardone.

After Hruska's death in 1971, the property passed to his heirs. During one of his stays in 1988, **André Heller** discovered the somewhat forgotten power place. Heller, who had achieved worldwide fame as a universal artist breaking genre boundary, took on Hruska's legacy. Today, the *Giardino Botanico* is home to around 3000 plant species from all over the world - ranging from the Himalayas to the Alps, from Mato Grosso to New Zealand, from Japan to Australia, Canada and Africa. This incredible diversity is united by contemporary sculptures and remarkable landscape architecture to create a complete artwork. The adventure journey, carefully staged in detail by Heller, begins at the entrance gate, where visitors are greeted by sibylline snakes and day and night symbols.

The ticket booth was designed by **Susanne Schmögner** and stands out with colours and shapes that connect the adult world with childhood memories. **Keith Haring's** figures and steles surprise you just as much as **Roy Lichtenstein's** pyramid. Works by **Auguste Rodin**, **Fernand Leger**, **Pierre-Auguste Renoir**, **Peter Pongratz**, **Oswald Tschirtner** or **Edgar Tezak** meet wind chimes and water surfaces. Two of the largest amethysts ever found on earth are just as astonishing as a steam-breathing mosaic sculpture of a fantasy dragon by **Rudolf Hirt**. These eccentricities are connected by a maze of paths and resting places, designed by **Erwin Novak**, among others. Streams, ponds with water lilies spanned by bamboo bridges, lotus flowers and waterfalls refresh and enchant with reflections and sounds. In the middle of the project is a small alpine valley with pine trees, nordic trees, rocks, gorges, and dolomite rock that has been painstakingly brought in. The whole ensemble is an invitation to leave behind the hectic pace of everyday life.

In his 30 years as host, André Heller invited countless artist friends such as **Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, HC Artmann, Gert Jonke, David Bowie, Brian Eno** and **Peter Gabriel** to find high energy and relaxation in this wonder place. Today, the new owners **Jovanka and Hans Porsche**, in collaboration with André Heller, generously, caringly and gently hold their protective hands over the treasure.

The region

Lake Garda is only 65 metres above sea level, thus providing a climate similar to that of a Mediterranean coastal area situated 300 kilometres further south - with high daily average sunshine, a dry atmosphere and an average temperature of 13.3 degrees Celsius. The garden city of Gardone Riviera is populated by cypresses, palm trees, oleander as well as orange trees, and those who walk along the shore can see Monte Baldo in the distance, sometimes covered with snow until May.