



Grassy knolls

“We have never lived in such an exciting time,” says Tim Smit, dismissing the doomsayers with a grin. “The environmental movement is on the cusp of a renaissance. We’re entering a period of consciousness in which we see ourselves as of the planet, rather than simply living on it.”

Education, regeneration and transformation are some of the buzzwords used by this Dutch-born, British-based entrepreneur and eco-science visionary, who will be sharing his ideas at WOMADelaide’s Planet Talks in March.

An archeologist who spent 10 years as a composer and producer, winning gold discs for his work in rock and opera, 58-year-old Smit is now best known for his achievements in Cornwall, southern England, where in

1990 he restored the magical Lost Gardens of Heligan (above) on a forgotten Edwardian estate. In 2001 he opened the Eden Project: two vast biomes housing a rainforest and other ecosystems, built on a sterile clay pit.

Part financed by the European Union, the project has reportedly contributed more than £1 billion to the Cornish economy.

“The point of Eden was to show that you can turn the most unpromising of places into things of beauty and joy,” Smit says.

Between founding events such as the Big Lunch, an annual get-together of neighbours across Britain, and establishing HOW2, a digital technical college focused on agriculture and horticulture, Smit has spent the past few years extending the Eden “brand” into other countries.

“My ambition is to have one Eden Project in every continent of the world,” Smit says.

A £100 million China Eden project is slated for Qing Dao, a polluted Chinese city keen to clean up its act; there are plans to regenerate the earthquake zone in Avonside, Christchurch; and a project involving First Nations people in British Columbia, Canada, has been given the green light.

Back in Cornwall, an exhibition exploring the science of bacteria and other microbes has proved the Eden Project’s most successful yet. “We share traits with other living things to a far greater degree than we ever believed possible.” Smit flashes a smile. “Get ready: we are on the verge of understanding something absolutely profound.”

Jane Cornwall



Dishing the dirt

In a fresh take on the now ubiquitous claim of farm-to-table dining, Melbourne potters Ilona Topolcsanyi and Colin Hudson have created platters and bowls for one of Australia’s finest regional restaurants, using clay dug out of its own garden.

“Potters traditionally work using only local materials,” Topolcsanyi explains. “So we approached Dan Hunter of Brae, because we knew he sourced a great deal of his food from the garden, and he loved the idea.”

The pair gathered clay from the dam on the Birregurra property in south-western Victoria, then used it to create a 450-strong collection of organic, textural crockery that has a natural, understated luxury to it. Glazes were made with ash from Brae’s outdoor oven.

“It’s a crafted, hand-made frame for crafted, hand-made food,” says Topolcsanyi, who nurtures a dream of cutting plate miles just as Hunter has cut food miles. “One day, I’d love to build a kiln on the property, so that plates could be made on site.”

Australia’s best chefs ranked Brae fourth in *The Australian Financial Review’s* Australia’s Top 100 Restaurants Awards last year.

Jill Duplex



Alessi’s flask master



Italian homewares brand Alessi has given us kettles with plastic bird whistle stoppers by Michael Graves, corkscrews shaped like girls in party frocks by Alessandro Mendini, and that pip-spitting juicer by Philippe Starck. Founded in 1921 by Giovanni Alessi in the town of Omegna, the globally recognised brand

is credited with bringing design to the masses. Alberto Alessi, Giovanni’s grandson and now company president, has finally joined the ranks of the brand’s designers himself. His elegant, flask-like bottle contains chardonnay, pinot noir and dessert wine made on his own vineyard.

“Counting some 300 of the world’s best designers as part of the Alessi family, it would be a bit embarrassing if I got it wrong,” he says. “But even this design, I copied. It’s inspired by a detail in a Leonardo da Vinci sketch.” Called Leo, the bottle doubles as a vase once its contents are drunk. *Stephen Todd*

