

When in 1991 I first had the opportunity to visit the famous Suzhou gardens of which I had heard so much, I was enchanted. I remained entranced by that magic for a good two days. Strolling down those paths gave me a sense of going back in time, retracing the history of man, from antiquity to the present. Between 1997 and 2000, 9 gardens of the town of Suzhou were declared part of the World Heritage by UNESCO. This region was already famous in Marco Polo's time. He visited it for this reason, later describing the more than 6.000 small stone bridges and the exceptionally mild climate: an earthly paradise. The words of this Venetian were steeped in wistfulness at the memory of these gardens. The same that I experienced on my return to Italy.

When, during one of my later journeys to China, I told Samuel Kung, Director of the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, about my admiration for and attachment to the Suzhou gardens, he spoke to me about the garden of Master Ye Fang. The encounter with the Master and the visit to the garden created by him did the rest. The spell was complete: unlike other classical

gardens, the garden of this “young” artist has been built to be lived in and to cultivate ideas.

I thus began to dream of bringing a garden in the Chinese classical style to the Island of San Servolo and of asking Master Ye Fang to create it: where better than in a University, and in the very town which was Marco Polo’s, to host a place of the soul, a breeding ground for thought, a bridge joining East and West.

The design phase proper began in September of last year [2008], with the first on-site inspection of the Island by the Master, to make a practical assessment of the various options for execution of the work.

The project has gone forward and gained increasing momentum; indeed, so much so that the project for a book with the title “A Suzhou garden in Venice” has taken shape, with a contribution by Samuel Kung and by other distinguished members of the academic and artistic world.

Umberto Vattani
President of
Venice International University