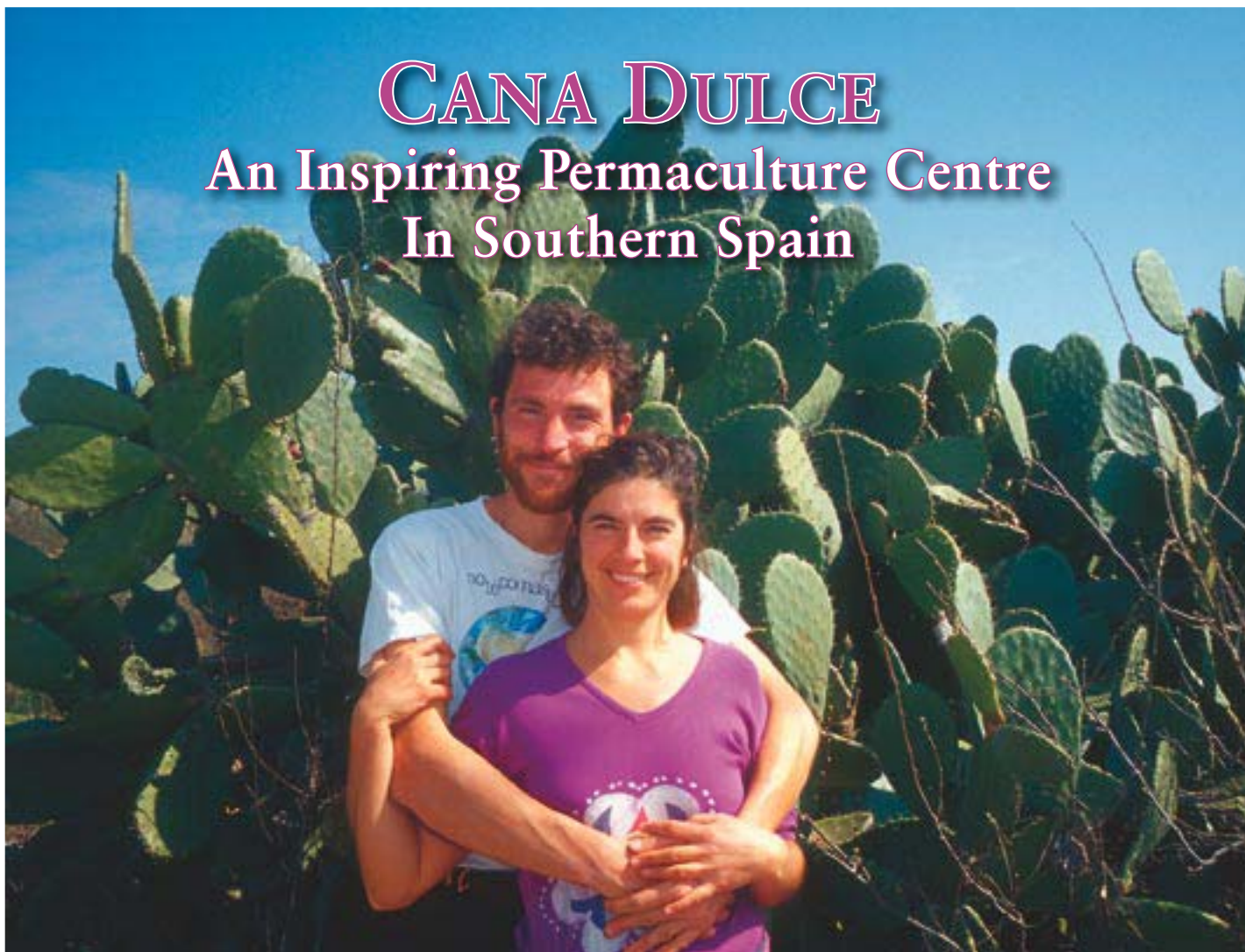


# CANA DULCE

## An Inspiring Permaculture Centre In Southern Spain



Steve Charter, from Spanish vegan permaculture project Ecoforest and author of *Eat More Raw*, describes how two Spanish ‘city kids’ gained the skills, experience and knowledge to create their own permaculture centre.

**C**ana Dulce (pronounced ‘canya dulthay’) is emerging as one of the most important permaculture centres in Spain. Created by Lucho Iglesias and Matricia Lana, Cana Dulce is a home, teaching and experimentation centre for permaculture, Kundalini Yoga, low impact building and natural living. It is part of a growing network of alternative projects and people in and around the town of Coin (Malaga province, southern Spain), and is open for people to come and learn about sustainable living through courses, workshops and holiday stays.

### CITY KIDS

Matricia (from Asturias in the north of Spain) and Lucho (from Madrid) both grew up in cities, knowing nothing of the practicalities of rural life. They met in 1995 at the permaculture community in Madrid where Lucho lived at the time during a permaculture course led by Emilia Hazelip. Emilia, along with Luciano

Furcas and Sheena Lamb, has been a great inspiration and teacher for them. Lucho had discovered permaculture in 1992, the same year that Matricia started walking the yoga path – so they immediately recognised their mutual love for simple natural living and a passion for the positive, practical approach

With few permaculture training or diploma resources available in Spain, Lucho and Matricia followed their own path. Lucho developed his permaculture knowledge through a determined search for the limited permaculture and eco-living material that was available in Spanish, whilst Matricia strengthened her practise of yoga and completed her studies to qualify as a language teacher.

Together they travelled, working all over Spain and staying at many ecological projects, knowing they had to immerse themselves in a diversity of practical, hands-on experiences of ecological agriculture and rural life. They worked on small scale traditional

*Above:* Matricia and Lucho, two city kids who have made the transition to the country and set up a successful permaculture centre.



**Above:**  
The eco-built bioclimatic house.

**Centre:**  
Canes are used for many aspects of building. Here they infill the timber frame on the guest cabin.

**Below:**  
Mixed planting in a synergistic bed around one of the ponds.

farms, and on larger organic and biodynamic farms – often doing tough low paid work in the fields with illegal immigrants, picking fruit and learning crafts. In 1997, they managed the inspiring Arte Elemental project, set up by Sheena Lamb (RSA) and Luciano Furcas (Italy) near Cadiz, with its gardens, aquaculture system, low impact buildings, solar power systems, art and crafts, and its dome covered vegetarian restaurant. Arte Elemental seeded many other projects and numerous permaculture pioneers.

Gradually, they saved what money they could towards their dream of starting their own permaculture centre. In January 2000, they found the land that was to become Cana Dulce. Then, after much research and with help from family and friends, in August 2000 they bought the 1.5 hectare (4 acre) plot bordering the Rio Grande. Abandoned for 13 years and apparently always chemical free, this long, flat, narrow plot, with a 7m (23ft) drop from top end to bottom, had a handful of suffering orange trees, very overgrown grass, brambles and general wildness, as well as the native canes (caña) that gave the project its name. But it was mainly completely empty of trees, apart from one boundary lined with unkempt pomegranates, native elms and yet more canes.



Once on the land Matricia and Lucho lived in a family tent for 15 months. They refined their objectives, whilst developing the site design and planting the first gardens and 500 trees – all this before starting to build their eco-house. Through the design process they learnt more about the needs and characteristics of both the land and themselves, with family and friends, neighbours and local farmers being a great support and source of skills and knowledge throughout.

Now, 4½ years later, the project includes a 50m<sup>2</sup> (540ft<sup>2</sup>) multi-functional eco-house, with 50m<sup>2</sup> of outside living space attached, several low impact structures – a caña cabin, a solar shower block, and a compost toilet – an established Zone 1 and 2 garden (with a solar cooker, ponds, synergistic beds and a 35m<sup>3</sup> (1,235ft<sup>3</sup>) irrigation tank-come-swimming pool), an extensive irrigation system and 7m (22ft) deep well, a 10m (33ft) diameter shaded outdoor activity circle, a great deal of composting, maturing zones 3 and 4 and a good dose of zone 5 which merges into the wildlife-rich banks of the Rio Grande.



During this time Lucho has also developed skills in grafting and tree care, eco-horticulture, low impact eco-building, and in the use of caña in construction and for hand-crafted furniture, whilst Matricia is now qualified as both a Kundalini yoga teacher and a Spanish teacher for English speakers.

Reflecting on their path Matricia says, “It’s been really hard to create this, but now we are seeing the fruits of all that work. I love our house here and it’s wonderful that it is a real home now. That feels great.”

#### **ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY**

Beyond Cana Dulce, Matricia and Lucho have been active members of ‘Ecologistas en Accion’. With friends they were founding members of a local branch of the national campaigning network and charity, Nueva Cultura de Agua, which has fought for sanity in the Spanish national water plan (fortunately scrapped by the new Spanish government in 2004). Matricia has been president of the local group, and their work helped change political and social attitudes

towards an ongoing dam proposal in the ecologically important Rio Grande valley and led to an ecological award from the provincial government for the group's work. Matricia and Lucho have also been active in the Spanish ecovillage network and helped form the Iberian Permaculture Network in 2003 (Red Iberica de la Permacultura). Which all shows how important it is to be active in zones 0 to 5, as well as in Zones A to D – from your own land out to the bioregion (see page 42, Eco-Footprinting).

Caná Dulce is now part of a growing 'garden' of local permaculture, natural health and other alternative projects and people in and around the town of Coin. Drawn to the area by pioneers such as Juan Ramos (something of a Spanish Robert Hart, pioneering Fukuoka/natural farming techniques and a low impact, vegetarian lifestyle for 20 years on the edge of Coin), Caná Dulce emerged more or less at the same time as the Ecoforest raw food permaculture project. Ecoforest found that possibly Spain's only vegan permaculturists, Matricia and Lucho, had



synchronistically landed in the same town! Like a magnetic force, there is something going on around this town of Coin.

The future plans for Caná Dulce now include more residents, cabins and toilets, a small school for low impact construction, more ponds, and more food growing to provide for courses and visitors. In 2005, Chema Vazquez, another local 'ecologista', permaculturist and campaigner, will be joining to help in the development of the gardens, the building of new eco-cabins and with the courses. The desire is for people to invest and share with Matricia and Lucho, through work and financially, to create an outstanding and highly effective centre. So with typical enthusiasm, a serious smile, and twinkling his eyes, Lucho says, "I just want people to be able to come here and feel the energy of enthusiasm and positivity, to see such beautiful and productive examples of permaculture, and just go 'Yes! This is what I want to do!'"

The permaculture, Kundalini yoga and natural hygienist (NH) philosophy of Caná Dulce make an



excellent guild for creating whole health. NH and permaculture go very well together, with NH recommending simple meals, and a high percentage of fresh raw fruit and veg. So overall the food philosophy is to be vegan, with primarily home grown and local food – and if not home grown to be organic as much as possible.

This couple are two of the most inspiring permaculture pioneers I have met, and in 4½ years Matricia and Lucho have received and welcomed more than 500 visitors and volunteers, friends and family to Caná Dulce – and they say a big 'thank you' to them all.

Their enthusiasm means that Caná Dulce's programme of activities now include courses in permaculture, Kundalini yoga and a variety of ecological and natural health workshops. You can stay here short or long term, as a relaxing eco-holiday venue or as a base from which to carry out your own local property search. And at Caná Dulce you can now see and enjoy the seeds, flowers and fruits of a still young, but growing permaculture movement in Spain, at perhaps the best permaculture venue in southern Spain.

So remember, this was achieved by those young and idealistic city kids who now live in their very own permaculture heaven. Viva la Permacultura de España! 🌍

*Above:*  
**An exercise in practical mulching.**

*Centre:*  
**Citrus fruit growing round the compost toilet. Note the canes behind which give Caná Dulce its name.**

*Below:*  
**Matricia in a shady part of the 10 metre diameter activity circle.**





*Above and Right:*  
Cana Cabin, built to accommodate visitors. The extended roof provides a shady sitting area outside while the interior is both bright and cosy.



*Top right:*  
The solar showers both aesthetically pleasing and very functional.



#### FURTHER INFORMATION

*Cana Dulce Website: [www.permaculturacandulce.org](http://www.permaculturacandulce.org)*

*For details of the next two week Permaculture Design Course at Cana Dulce (in English), please visit [www.permaculture-steve.net](http://www.permaculture-steve.net)*

*Anyone looking for an affordable permaculture holiday or for a base to look for land in the area, can rent the beautiful and cosy Cana Cabin for a minimum of one week – email Matricia at [luchomat3@hotmail.com](mailto:luchomat3@hotmail.com)*

*See also [www.permaculturacanadulce.org](http://www.permaculturacanadulce.org) for general information on permaculture in Spain, in Spanish.*

#### PROJECT COSTS

**Land:** 5 million pesetas (Eu€30,000 / £20,000).

**Casa/house:** Eu€18,000 (£12,000) – including all finishing and mains electricity.

**Cana Cabana/cana cabin:** under Eu€2,000 (£1,300)

**Solar showers:** under Eu€3,000 (£2,000).

**Compost toilet:** under Eu€1,000 (£650).

**Planting and other infrastructure, e.g. 500 trees, irrigation system and tank, tool store, well, etc.:** Eu€26,000 (£15,500).

**Total financial investment:** Eu€80,000 (£52,000) approx.

**Estimated total value of investment including valuation, personal, donated and voluntary labour:** Eu€160,000 (£106,000).

#### ECO-FOOTPRINTING

**Zones A to G:** Consider the proportion of your needs you meet in each zone. And then design your life so that you meet at least 90% of your needs (physical, social, economic etc) within zones A to D. Then you'll probably be living sustainably...

Zone A = zones 0-5

Zone B = neighbourhood

Zone C = municipality

Zone D = Bioregion

Zone E = nation or state

Zone F = global region

Zone G = Gaia/the globe