

# Home grown

Bloggers Judith de Graaff and Igor Josifovic have created a whole community from their love of indoor plants – and now they've written a book to help even the most gardening-challenged get in on the act.

WORDS Mel Chesneau



**ABOVE** Igor Josifovic and Judith de Graaff. **BELOW** *Oxalis triangularis* loves lots of sunlight. **RIGHT** Black and white baskets combine with *Monstera deliciosa* for a graphic effect.



IN 2013, TWO BLOGGERS, JUDITH de Graaff (joelix.com) and Igor Josifovic (happyinteriorblog.com), met for coffee in Paris, and during a conversation that centred on their shared love of interior styling and passion for plants, decided to collaborate on a monthly column, for which they'd style plants in their own homes.

Soon their project expanded to include other bloggers. At the time, indoor plants were just beginning to make their mark in the interior world; little did they realise what a phenomenal trend they would become, nor did they envisage the huge green-loving community they'd build by creating the Instagram hashtag #urbanjunglebloggers.

Now the pair has written a coffee table book, *Urban Jungle: Living & Styling with Plants*, which showcases five green homes, loads of plant-styling ideas contributed by members of the Urban Jungle Blogger community, plus plant profiles and care tips. It's a fresh and practical manual for living stylishly with plants at your place.

I spoke to Judith and Igor recently in the lead-up to the release of the book.

**Judith/Igor (?), why plants in the home? Is it just the look, or more than that?** It is way more. At first, we notice the plants for their decorative features and as part of our interior styling. But

plants add much more than visual impact to our homes. They make our homes more natural, they enhance the living environment, they purify the air. Without plants, a home feels incomplete to us.

**Judith/Igor?, you introduce this book as a guide for anyone who wants to bring a little green into their home, novice or expert. Do you have green thumbs yourselves?** We don't believe in the concept of 'green thumbs' – we believe that everyone can have plants and keep them alive. The key lies in knowledge, and yes, it's also a trial-and-error process. With our book, we want to encourage people to give it a go. There's plenty of



FRONT OF A DARK WALL, BEAUTIFUL CALATHEA BECOMES A PIECE OF LIVING ART.

information on the world wide web, and we've consolidated a good deal of information in our book by featuring 10 popular houseplants and including simple plant-care tips and lots of styling and DIY ideas. We also want to take off the pressure people put on themselves when buying plants. Killing a plant is not a felony and won't stigmatise you for life – instead, consider failure a learning experience and try to figure out what you need to change to keep your plants happy.

**Judith, do you have any sad plant stories or green triumphs?** We both have our sad stories of plants that died during our travels – or in our suitcases

– overwatered plants, or adopted plants that didn't survive the change of location. But we'd rather celebrate the triumphs, like the small *Tradescantia pallida* cutting I gave Igor a few years ago, which is now thriving in his home. It grew so much in his Munich rooftop apartment that it's almost bigger than the mother plant in my home in France. This Purple Heart plant is very photogenic, with its reflecting branches and shimmering leaves, reflecting hues from purple to green.

**Judith/Igor?, how did you find the five green homes featured in the book?** It was probably the easiest part of the book. A lot of people in the Urban Jungle



ABOVE Add a vertical element to displays with specimens such as the snake plant (centre right). LEFT In front of a dark wall, Calathea becomes a piece of living art. BELOW Smaller snake plants pair well with succulents. OPPOSITE Marij ????



Bloggers community have amazing 'planty' homes. Because we wanted the book to be as diverse as possible, we tried to select people with different interior styles who lived in different European countries and had different family situations. We approached five of them and were welcomed into their homes with open arms, and exchanged lots of plant nerdiness and even some cuttings during the photoshoots. We're very proud and grateful to share their amazing homes with the world.

**Igor, you visited New Zealand earlier this year, do you have any favourite urban jungle haunts here?** I visited



With plants on different floors of the house, Marij has several watering cans at hand to make plant watering an easy chore.



**ABOVE** Larger cacti can be styled as living sculptures. **LEFT** This home in xxxxxx? houses xxxxxx? and *Monstera deliciosa*. **BELOW** A potted fiddle leaf fig and hanging *Pilea* beautify a bedroom in ??????.



New Zealand in February and March and loved your beautiful country so much – it was all I imagined and wished for. Some green discoveries in Auckland were an additional bonus. I absolutely loved Bioattic on Ponsonby Road for all the beautiful plants and unusual planters and vintage ceramics. It was exactly my kind of place! I loved The Botanist at City Works Depot, as well as all the lush greens at Little & Friday. I also enjoyed a good coffee surrounded by greens at Dear Jervois and Taupo's The Storehouse.

**Judith/Igor?, what easy-to-care-for plants would you suggest for indoor-**

**garden beginners?** We dedicated an entire chapter to how to start your own urban jungle. It's all about finding the right plant for your lifestyle and where you want to put it. Some low-maintenance plants that are easy and attractive are the aloe vera and the snake plant. Aloe vera has extra benefits: you can use the gel inside the leaves to calm your skin. And the snake plant – *Sansevieria* – is particularly well suited to rooms with less light. 🍀

*Join the green community on Instagram with #urbanjunglebloggers, or if you have a blog, sign up to receive monthly topics via [urbanjunglebloggers.com](http://urbanjunglebloggers.com).*



*Images from Urban Jungle: Living and Styling with Plants, by Igor Josifovic and Judith de Graaff. Published by Callwey. \$40.*