

RAFAEL NORIEGA CAMPERO

Born November 13th 1982 in Mexico City

Passionate about nature since he was a child, Rafa started propagating plants at 6 years old, catching and breeding snakes and lizards in an attempt to change people's fear and showing the importance of reptiles since 9. He did his first gardens and landscape designs at the age of 16 through his family's architecture projects, planting the seed for natural building and garden design for years to come.

In the year 2000, he was admitted at Mexico's National Autonomous University, (UNAM), getting the 3rd best score nationally for the Biological and Environmental Sciences area. There he coursed his studies for Biology in the Faculty of Exact Sciences.

He also studied a 1 semester Scientific Photography Course in the Photography Laboratory, from the Physics Department of the same Faculty.

He participated as well on the Hydroponics Courses taught by Professor Antonio Gonzalez Guzman (2003-2006) Scientific Diving course with the Science Diving Team, Biology Department. (Facultad de Ciencias, UNAM)

Also completed the 1 year Training for Advanced Diving with the UNAM's Diving Team, with Jack Baron Tapia, getting the 3 Star Advanced Diver Level under the CMAS (Confédération Mondiale Des Activités Subaquatiques)

Participated in interdisciplinary research on protein structure and biochemistry, under direction of Dr Edgar Vazquez, Chemistry Institute/Instituto de Quimica and Instituto de Investigaciones Biomédicas, UNAM.

Yelapa, Mexico

In 2009, he moved to Yelapa, Cabo Corrientes, Mexico where his focus on science changed from laboratory research to applying it to nature conservation, ecological restoration, agroecology, permaculture and plant medicine.

Los Naranjos Eco Retreat

In 2010 he started Los Naranjos Ecoretreat, integrating and applying his knowledge in architecture, chemistry, biology and garden design. After acquiring access to the 6 acres, Rafa and his team constructed 6 houses for guests and multiple gardens, full of native plants and animals. Accomodating up to 40 people, his team has hosted thousands of guests through retreats, long and short term stays, volunteer programs and educational workshops. Guests of Los Naranjos learn about land design, energy retention systems, producing yields and products, integrating with the community, managing waste, growing and reusing materials, and natural pattern recognition.

- Bioconstruction: Design with hybrid techniques combining traditionally used local materials with others not used before, but if properly treated, turn out as a better new alternative in terms of sustainability and environmental impact
- Renovation and implementing systems for treating and reusing water resources, under Ing. Rodolfo Ruiz Larraguivel, pioneer and expert in closed systems for water treatment and reuse. (Facultad de Quimica, UNAM)
- Erosion containment and soil restoration
- Restoration of local ecosystem (native flora and fauna), under advisory from Dr. Marta Juana Martinez Gordillo PhD, National Herbarium, Science Faculty, UNAM

By bringing back the local ecosystem, Los Naranjos has become a landmark example for the community.

Rafa has worked constantly on innovating and designing methods and techniques for solving local problems, advising and participating with local and municipal authorities on water and waste management projects and infrastructure, as well as biodiversity and nature conservation issues.

He participated in the foundation of the Yelapa Water Committee for managing local water resources

Established and co directed Colectivo Verde to inspire others create local food gardens during the pandemic

Madreselva

In 2017, he initiated Madreselva Biocultural Center, an organic garden focused on experimentation as well as being a space for the divulging and exchange of knowledge and seeds within the community.

He has used the 1.5 acres to experiment with over 200 varieties of fruits and vegetables. After years of trial and error, up to 70% of the ingredients used for retreats at Los Naranjos have been harvested from Madreselva along with Los Naranjos.

Also it serves as a space for volunteers and students' social service, such as Biologist Lorena Castro's work establishing the database of records for the garden under the direction of Dr. Mariana Benitez Keirad.

Various workshops are held at Madreselva to bring the community together through education in environmentalism as well as the arts, music and skill-sharing. Rafa teaches workshops in areas such as water and organic waste management as well as garden design and management.

- Seed production and improvement of local varieties
- Composting methods
- Homemade grease traps and biofilters
- Crop interactions and association
- Production of biofertilizers and biopesticides
- Reproduction of micorrhizal organisms

Madreselva is an ongoing project to increase awareness around the importance of community and environmental impact—throughout Yelapa and beyond.

Over time, he has become a reference for the community on the use of medicinal plants, thanks to combining his scientific knowledge with everything local people have taught him over 16 years in Yelapa.

Madre Selva

