



## The first agave school in the only desert of Europ

In November 2008, Tim Bernhardt established the Agave School, in Los Molinos del Río Aguas. The small, ecological village is located in the Karst de Yesos de Sorbas, a National Park, near Almería, in Andalusia, Spain.

In the middle of the only desert in Europe, the village is a blossoming oasis thanks to the presence of one of the few rivers in the arid province which flows all year round. Los Molinos del Río Aguas is completely off-grid. Electricity is autonomously supplied from solar sources and domestic water comes from the river.

The first agave plants were introduced to Almería from Mexico about 500 years ago. Today they characterise the landscape and as such have become a symbol for the province. In the 1950s, about 400 hectares were cultivated for the extraction of fibre, known as sisal, from the leaves of the plant.

Timbe specialises in the extensive applications of agave plants and has made research into this area his way of life. In the early nineties, after moving from Hamburg, he settled in Andalusia where he began his project, focusing on the uses of agave and its wood. After 15 years of detailed study, Tim Bernhardt, alias Timbe, founded the Agave School in Almería. Here, in the region with the least precipitation in Europe, the raw material from agave has the potential to become an important industrial material.

What began with the creation of a drum using the lower part of the dry, wooden flower stem later developed into a much deeper interest in agave. Growing to a height of up to 12 metres, it was obvious that the plant offered far more practical applications. The aim of the School is to develop workshops and working groups to delve further into the potential of agave as a raw material.

One of the current projects, "El Mundo de las Pita's (The World of the Agave), seeks to keep investigating the potential uses of agave and to educate others in this respect. One area of the School's focus is to use the wood from the fast-growing flower stem- the Gold of the Desert- to transform it into innovative products, a positive step forward in an era of climate change and a demand for ecological alternatives to industrial processes.

Such products include a range of musical instruments, furniture, wooden boards, lampshades, masks, jewellery and a number of craft articles. Other products from agave currently being researched by the School include agave syrup, bio-soap and pulque (agave beer).

The first practical experiments were carried out in relation to these products in spring 2009. The production of organic plastics, recyclable fibreglass and renewable energy from agave already exist on industrial scales and it is hoped that the development and research being done into the applications of agave wood by the School will become as commonplace in future.

The Agave School teaches the traditional uses of agave in Almería province. The founding ethos of the School is to preserve and transmit the traditional uses of agave. In the School's garden for example, different varieties of agave are cultivated to better understand the specific uses of each different species. The School also incorporates the Agave Museum which contains a body of information relating to the tradition and the uses of agave in the province of Almería. As well as informative photographic and film material related to the subject, handmade musical instruments, craft articles, products from agave fibres and a much more are exhibited in the Museum.

### Workshops offered by the Agave School

The school offers a number of bespoke workshops in which participants can experiment with agave as a material as well as make their own products. Anybody with an interest in developing the applications of wood from agave are encouraged to contact Timbe directly. Accommodation for individuals or groups visiting the School, its Museum or a workshop can be arranged on request.

**LIVE, LOVE & LEARN**



**AWASSA, ETHIOPIA**



Agave Museum represents a German NGO with projects in Ethiopia, established by the Bernhardt family. The Agave Museum also exists to represent and promote the work of the NGO, Edget Baandnet Children Centre e.V. (EBCC). EBCC is a family project which was established in 2006 by Gundi Brendes-Bernhardt and Jörn Bernhardt, Timbe's parents, whilst they lived and worked in Awassa, Ethiopia, for 3.5 years. In the Museum, photo and film documentaries showing a visit to a sisal factory in Awassa, as well as the countryside, people, markets and villages of the south region of Ethiopia can be seen.

