

# Planting Big Dreams on a Small Island:

*Permaculture workshop with Jerome Osentowski in Madeira, Portugal*

By [Diana Arhire](#) [Mar 20, 2026](#)



Jerome, Markus & Jacek, at Arambha farm

Every January comes with that quiet hope that maybe this will be a great year.

Sometimes the universe actually delivers.

At the end of January, the planets aligned just right and we had Jerome Osentowski delivered onto our little Portuguese island of Madeira, one of his many stops during a long journey across Europe.

If you're not quite sure where Madeira is on the map, just look for some tiny dots floating in the eastern Atlantic Ocean. That's us. Technically Europe. Emotionally... somewhere between the tropics and a dream.

This island grows a lot of things. Around six varieties of bananas, thirteen varieties of anona, and roughly fifteen varieties of avocados (give or take, depending on who you ask and how enthusiastic they are about fruit). Add mangoes, papayas, guavas, passion fruit, dragon fruit,

Suriname cherry, countless citrus varieties, and whatever else enjoys warm volcanic soil and ocean mist.

And then there's the forest.

Madeira's Laurisilva is a 20-million-year-old laurel forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site covering about a fifth of the island. It quietly drinks water from passing clouds and fog, then releases it slowly into rivers and springs, feeding the island's hydrological network.

Madeira may look like a tropical paradise, but like many islands, it also faces challenges: forest degradation and biodiversity loss from human pressure, soil degradation, wildfire risk, marine ecosystem pressures, and the constant balancing act between tourism and ecology.

## When the Right People Appear



Jerome, being our Yoda master. The Force is definitely with us.



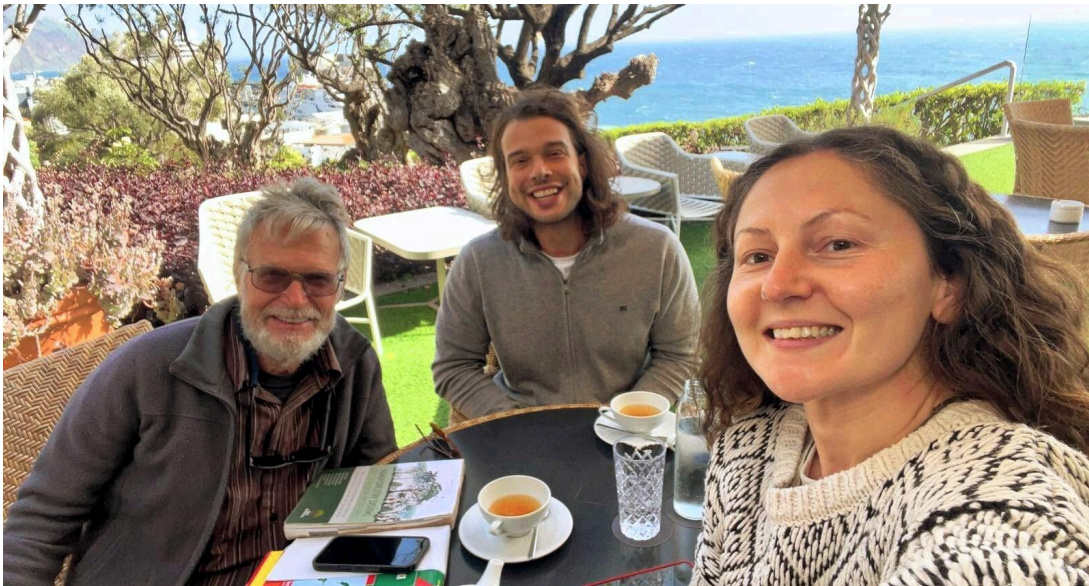
Jacek, shooting positive laser beams & guiding the teams

Permaculture, for those unfamiliar, is a design approach that looks at how natural ecosystems function and applies those patterns to growing food, managing water, building communities, and regenerating landscapes.

Jerome Osentowski is a permaculture legend from the mountains of Colorado, USA, where he lives in a passive solar home he built at above 2,000m.

Director and founder of Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute and a permaculture designer for thirty years, he has also pioneered the Climate Battery Greenhouse, which uses ground heat storage systems to store heat from summer and autumn to use in winter, to enable a growing system for subtropical or tropical plants.

You can read more about his designs in his book *The Forest Garden Greenhouse: How to Design and Manage an Indoor Permaculture Oasis*, where he shows how bringing the forest garden indoors is not only possible, but doable on unlikely terrain and in cold climates, using permaculture design concepts- integration, multi-functions, perennials, and polycultures.



Jerome, Emanuel & Diana. Tea break in Funchal, under some ancient olive trees.

Jerome is generally one of those humans who radiates calm curiosity about the world, and carries that rare combination of deep knowledge and humbleness, along with a quick sense of humor that instantly puts you at ease. I was inspired not only by his lifetime of work, but also by his joy in sharing knowledge, the courage to travel the world alone at 84, and simply his confidence to keep moving and stay curious, knowing he'll meet the right people along the way.

So naturally, I asked him if he might want to give a workshop while visiting Madeira.

And naturally, he said yes.

That was the moment the lazy January mood evaporated.

Suddenly, I found myself organizing a last-minute permaculture workshop, linking up with the Arambha team and volunteers.

Jerome became the spark that reignited a whole chain of connections, old friendships, and new dreams.

Or as Jerome himself likes to call them... wet dreams.

Things started flowing like a small stream slowly turning into a river, and occasionally a waterfall.

You can find more about Jerome's work here:

<https://crmpi.org/>

## **Enter the Polish Permaculture Ninja**

And then the plot thickened.

Jerome invited another teacher to join us. From Poland. At the last minute.

Jacek Winckiewicz is a permaculture designer, educator, and co-founder of Truskawkowe Pola (Strawberry Fields), an emerging ecovillage in central Europe, where he works with a team to develop a network of cooperating permaculture farms.

On his several-hectare homestead, Jacek focuses on regenerative land design, soil restoration, and the creation of resilient, low-input systems integrating plants, animals, and people.

In addition to design work, he is actively involved in hands-on implementation, including earthworks, water management, planting systems, and natural building. He regularly teaches, consults, and supports others in turning designs into living landscapes.

Jacek and Jerome recently met in person during Jerome's trip to Poland. You can read more about this inspiring visit here:

[https://permisie-pl.translate.google.pl/permakultura-w-drodze-o-wizycie-jeromea-osentowskiego-w-polsce/?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=pl&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=pl&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=wapp](https://permisie-pl.translate.google.pl/permakultura-w-drodze-o-wizycie-jeromea-osentowskiego-w-polsce/?_x_tr_sl=pl&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=pl&_x_tr_pto=wapp)

So there he was, our courageous Jacek, hopping on a plane to Madeira, in really bad weather. The things that you do to escape the Polish winter for a few days...

Laid-back guy, grounded, great sense of humor. Instant friendships formed, and stories began flowing.

His story is a reminder that big dreams often begin in very ordinary ways. He simply wanted a healthier place to raise his kids and a better life for his family. Out of that simple wish, a whole ecovillage slowly emerged, with more families joining the vision along the way.

More about Jacek's work and the ecovillage here:

<https://www.truskawkowepola.pl/>

So now we have an American permaculture legend, a Polish ecovillage builder, and a handful of dreamers driving around Madeira through sun, fog, rain, and the island's endless microclimates.



Davide, Lena, Jacek & Emanuel. Connecting with the neighbours is also important - local village bar and tasting Madeiran traditional drinks.

## The Local Warriors

Enter Emanuel, or how I like to call him, my Madeiran permaculture angel.

Our friendship began randomly at a New Year's party, with a conversation about dream projects and farming in Madeira. Within days, he was helping me organize everything,

including island visits with the teachers and students, heroically driving us around the island, and keeping the good energy flowing.

Emanuel joined the workshop, along with other island dreamers. People holding land, farms, or ideas waiting patiently to be born or reshaped.

And that's really what the workshop was about: sitting down together with each other and with our dreams, then giving them structure through the permaculture design process.

We visited several local projects for inspiration, friends who are quietly reshaping the landscape.

Nasha and Johan, whose story is essentially one of fire and rebirth. They created a permaculture oasis around their home in the south-west coast of the island, which completely burned down during the wildfires years ago. Today, the only silent reminder of that disaster on their land is a few charred tree stumps. Thanks to their care, patience, and hard work, the garden is thriving again in full glory.

Steven and Ellen, guardians of a small paradise in the north of the island. Walking their land, you can see what a truly harmonious relationship between humans and nature can look like. Every plant and tree has a story to tell, and Steven is patiently telling us how it's all about the connections. It also helped that he was feeding us fruits straight from the trees. A full sensory experience.



Visiting an agroforestry project in Funchal, guided by Vicente.

Vicente, weaving agroforestry right into the city of Funchal. Step into his urban garden and the city disappears. Layers of endemic and exotic plants & trees surround you, inviting you to touch, smell, and explore. Vicente also helps others redesign their land, bringing abundance into the city itself. Lucky neighbors!

Beautiful experiments are happening quietly across the island, reminding us that humans can certainly be a destructive force in nature, but we also carry the ability to regenerate the ecosystems we belong to.

Or as we say in permaculture: the problem is the solution.

## **Two Days of Fast-Forward Permaculture**

Then came Saturday morning, January 31<sup>st</sup>.

Around forty curious humans gathered for the 2-day workshop, a good mix of locals and expats from all over the world. Markus, our host, gave us a tour of the Arambha project, a farm & community in the central part of the island.

The workshop itself was essentially a permaculture design course squeezed into two intense days, presented and guided by Jerome & Jacek.

We explored permaculture principles & how to apply them into daily life, land observation & design thinking, and practical work in the field. Teams were formed to tackle different aspects of the project, considering the vision, goals, and challenges.



The making of a swale - a level, contour-dug ditch and berm system designed to catch and store rainwater runoff, increase soil moisture, and reduce erosion.

On the second day, teams presented their designs to the teachers and the group.

There were ambitious ideas, creative solutions, and lively debates with Markus about the realities of managing a large project: farming on steep terrain, risk of wildfires, water distribution, financial limitations, and the occasional legal obstacles.

When people from different cultures and backgrounds start brainstorming together, something interesting happens.

Diversity becomes the engine of creativity.

In permaculture, this idea is captured by the Edge Effect principle. At the boundary where two ecosystems meet, forest and meadow, river and land, urban and wild, diversity increases. And where diversity increases, so does productivity and resilience. And abundance follows. And that's the ultimate goal, isn't it?



The real bosses of Arambha farm.

By the end of the weekend, the group had produced several potential design ideas for Arambha's future, from water management systems to expanding the food forest and improving the farm's learning spaces. Between presentations, we shared food, laughter, and a little bit of happy chaos.

Moments like this remind me that permaculture isn't only about land design. It's also about designing communities that help good ideas grow.

The days ended with the kind of sunsets that feel almost illegal. The farm glowing green below us, the Atlantic stretching endlessly into the horizon, a perfect moment for quiet reflection & gratitude.



Sharing a sunset & good vibes. We're beautiful, as Nature intended.

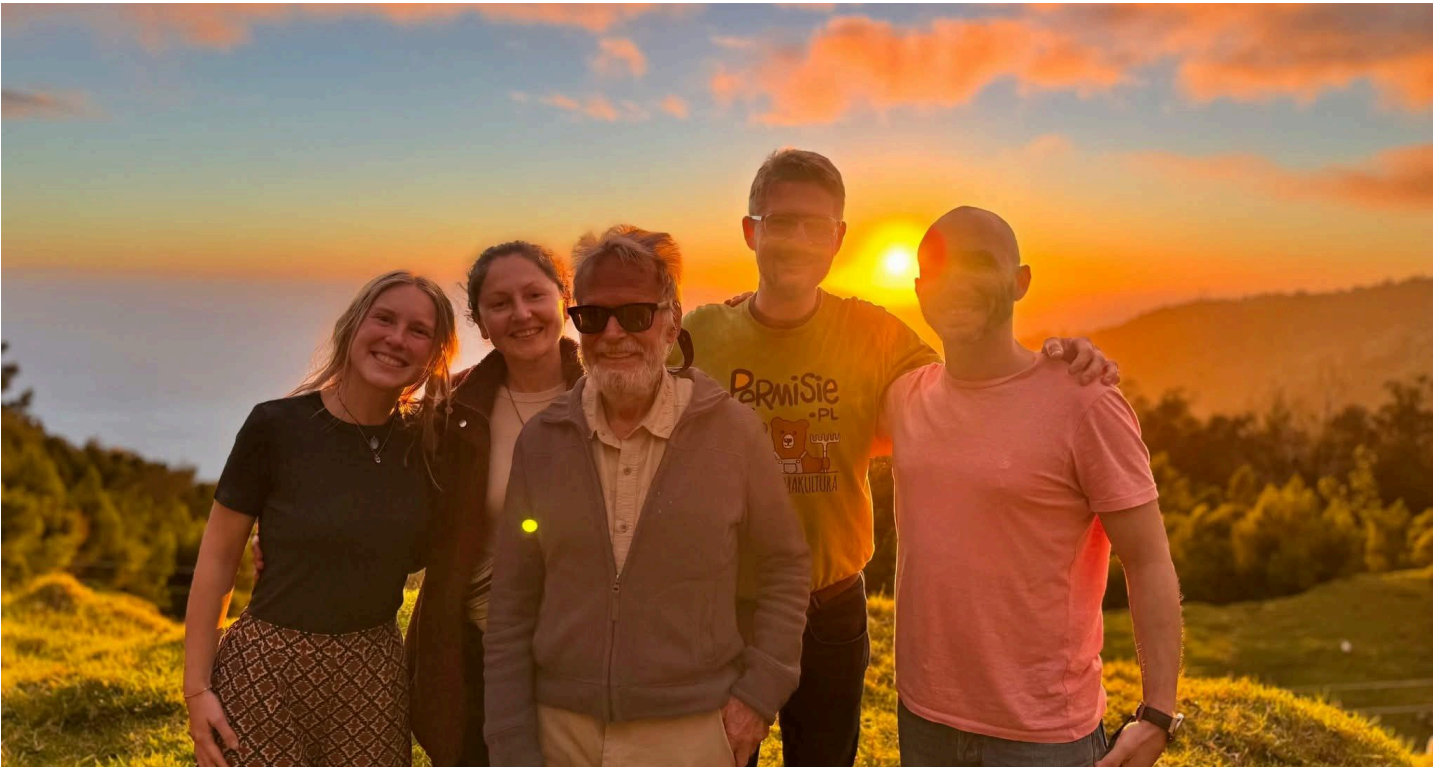
## **Arambha Playground and Dreaming Forward**

The Arambha idea germinated around eight years ago, when Markus, the founder, arrived in Madeira with the vision of regenerating an old agricultural land using permaculture, while opening space for more people to join the project. Support came along with a growing international community and many volunteers over the years.

It's a place where people come to learn about the land, but also about themselves.

A playground for experimentation, learning, friendships, and collaboration.

I lived there myself for about a year, getting involved with the many ongoing quests: reforestation, natural building, mushroom farming, agritourism, hosting events, and permaculture courses. But the best thing that came out of that time is the friendships I've made.



Lena, Diana, Jerome, Jacek, Pedro, and a magical sunset at the farm.

The workshop also sparked new friendships and bigger ideas for the future.

Ideas about turning Madeira into a hub for permaculture and agroforestry education, connecting Arambha and other local projects into a network that can host teachers and students from all over the world, so we can share knowledge and plant more dreams.

But also get down to earth, literally, and plant more trees.

The year is already blossoming well, with several workshops held in the last few months, and many plans ahead, including an extended Permaculture Design Course in May.

See more about the project, next courses, and explore what's possible:

<https://arambha.net/>

Madeira itself is a reminder of what's possible. An island born from volcanic fire. Shaped, slowly, by the Atlantic. Softened into green, into flowers, into life again. A place that quietly invites you to reinvent yourself.

Or at the very least... to dream a little bigger.