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## Island blessed with works of wonder

**M**ANY readers of this column will have holidayed in Lanzarote in the Canary Islands and will know this extraordinary island much better than I.

They will know that a car may be rented for as little as €10 a day, and that to explore its many fascinating worlds the first essential is a car.

They may, however, not have come across a small book, Lanzarote, Blind Crabs, Hoopoes and Volcanoes by Dr Horst Wilkens. It seems to be on sale only at the César Manrique Foundation, located at his home, now open to the public. Dr Wilkens's speciality is Lanzaroteño cave-dwelling marine life, and his extensive knowledge of the island's flora and fauna was acquired incidentally while studying these. For those interested in Lanzarote's geology, nature and agriculture, the €14 price tag will repay itself a thousand fold.

Lanzarote is like nowhere on earth. It is an island of aesthetics, of natural beauty and made-made beauty in harmony with nature. There is hardly a single vista that offends the eye. The natural forms are extraordinary and original, although to say 'original' implies some human agency in their creation; a better word would be 'unique'. The red-cone mountains, black rocks, white sand, blue sea



**Damien Enright**

takes a walk on the wild side of Lanzarote

and, above all, the plants and flowers that in springtime colonise deserts, dunes, road verges and lava fields are so spectacular that when I go walking, I hardly cover 500 yards per hour, so much does every sight absorb me.

Spring is a wonderful time to be here; the wildflowers cover almost everything that isn't rock and sometimes the rocks too. The chilly blasts of our first three days gave way to blithe and sunny weather with a light breeze. We use the borrowed apartment only for sleeping and set out daily to explore new corners of the island. Today, the vineyards of Geria,



The vineyards growing in the volcanic soil in La Geria.

Picture: iStock

green vines growing in troughs scooped out of the black lava pebbles, yesterday, a wild barranco at Teneguïme, the day before, Famara, a storm beach miles long. The water is no warmer than Ireland in July, but the sun changes every-thing.

Added to nature's marvels are those of human agency, the works of César Manrique — although he, like Shakespeare, Beethoven and the rest can hardly have been of the same species as ourselves. The primordial earth, the desert plains, the black stone coast, the native farms all inspired his creations.

He was, and still remains, Lanzarote's presiding genius.

Everywhere, his work is to be seen. He saved his native island from the hideous development then overwhelming the Spanish Mediterranean coast, and fought and won to have it conserved in perpetuity.

Seventeen years after his death, one may stroll at night into The Gran Meliá Salinas Hotel and walk through its unroofed atrium with palms and tree ferns soaring 60 feet against the star-filled sky and lianas and creepers falling 60 feet from the balconies. This was Manrique's concept. The only sound is

of rushing water and a frog chorus from the pools alongside lava-rocks paths that wind amid fountains and waterfalls, and through this tropical jungle in the heart of a hotel.

Among the most extraordinary of Manrique's works are the petrified volcanic bubbles he converted into living spaces beneath his home.

Beautiful and pleasantly cool, the ambience is strangely relaxing and agreeable. More awesome — but less domestic — are his installations at Jameos del Agua, a deep pool in a lava tunnel that runs from a mountain top for 8.5 km under the land and then beneath the sea.

The Atlantic seeps through narrow cracks in the pool floor and deep ocean creatures, normally surviving at 3000m around hydrothermal sea vents, are seen here, white blind crabs and marine worms, these having lost pigmentation and eyesight because they were redundant to their sea-trench lives. The tide rises and falls in this vast cathedral-chamber and visitors sit enthralled beside the huge pool, under the vaulting dome of a lava bubble, the deep silence of the underworld about them and the small white crabs slowly moving in the depths below.