

# REAL HOMES

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## Dream projects

**REAL ROOM IDEAS**

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trelliswork, hit-and-miss cedar battens arranged horizontally, or perforated sailcloth that filters the wind so only a subtle breeze is felt on the leeward (downwind) side.

Glass is commonly used as a balustrade and wind buffer on roof terraces as it provides uninterrupted views. Don't site it across prevailing winds unless there are a few holes in it, otherwise turbulence will smack over the top and down on you with great force. Don't put yourself at risk by teetering over high edges to fix screening – call in a specialist builder or a rope access company to tackle it for you.

Taller wind-tolerant shrubs offer some protection. Think of them as a living screen. Tough evergreens such as *Olearia*, *Phormium*, *Pittosporum* and Spotted laurel in big tubs are perfect for the job. Bamboo is worth trying too, except on very windswept roof terraces as its large leaves sway too much in the wind, which means the roots will shift about and the plants won't establish in their new pots.

You'll need protection from sunshine too. Shade sails are excellent – again, wind-porous materials are the best choice as you don't want a solid barrier, with the risk of the fabric tearing or flying away. A cheaper solution is to put up a parasol, but make sure it's securely anchored, otherwise strong gusts might blow it away.

### Choose a planting scheme

Plants will have to be very tough to cope with difficult conditions. They'll probably have to be tolerant of high winds and drought as well as strong sunshine or deep shade, depending on the aspect. Dense evergreen plants are good for year-round interest and most have thick, glossy leaves, which prevent them from drying out quickly. *Griselinia*, *Garrya*, *Viburnum tinus*, *Escallonia*, *Euonymus*, *Fatsia* and dwarf fan palms are ideal and provide shelter for colourful-but-tough perennials such as globe thistles, day lilies and *Heuchera* tucked underneath them.

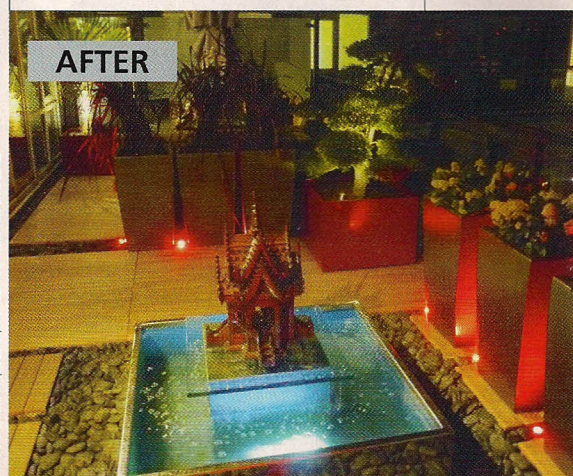
On open roof terraces, plants must be



BEFORE

**Above** This flat's roof terrace was an uninspiring space with simple concrete pavers and opaque glass dividing it from next door

**Below** The space is now a contemporary Eastern-style garden with a water feature, polished black pebbles, cedar decking and lighting



AFTER

PHOTOGRAPH (RIGHT) KATE GOULD GARDENS

able to cope with blazing sunshine. Choose plants such as thyme, lemon balm, sage, lavender, *Potentilla*, *Olearia*, *Caryopteris*, Californian lilac and dramatic Yuccas and Agaves. Grasses like hot conditions so they're a good option as they create subtle texture. *Miscanthus* (try 'Morning Light' or 'Flamingo') are robust and stand tall; or for very exposed sites, choose *Carex* and *Festuca* varieties which form tight, low clumps.

Dwarf conifers, like pencil junipers and *Pinus mugo* 'Mops', tolerate hot, exposed sites too and couldn't be better suited to roof terraces or balconies.

Alpines, whose natural habitat are clifftops and mountains, need little water and can bear extreme exposure to intense sunshine and strong winds. Place rows of terracotta bowls full of carpeting Sedum and Houseleeks – elegant and effortless.

### Consider materials

Weight is the most important practical consideration. With tiny balconies tacked onto the sides of flats or townhouses, you ►



# GARDEN DESIGN MADE EASY

BY *Nell James*

## Part Five: roof terraces & balconies

Whether you live in a house or flat, create a perfect outdoor area by following my advice for a planting scheme for year-round interest



Roof terraces and balconies provide a great opportunity to enjoy the surrounding views and extend the living space of your home, however small. It's important to get the right mix of materials and planting for creating a space with year-round interest.

### Identify a design theme

Sleek and simple is the golden rule when designing a roof terrace or balcony. Cottage or rustic themes rarely work. Go for a simple, linear layout with contemporary materials such as polished stone, rendered walls, Cor-Ten steel or concrete, or traditional ones such as woven hazel and clay pavers using them in a modern way. Choose materials to complement patterns or colours in the surrounding landscape or adjacent buildings so the design blends in.

Whatever layout you choose, take account of the view. Eyesores, like gas towers and motorway flyovers, will need to be subtly screened, but if you have a sea view or attractive cityscape, make the most of it in your design. Organise your area to maximise good views, maybe framing them with tall container plants or pencil junipers.

### Use decking

Decking is a good choice for a roof terrace or balcony because it's warm underfoot, easy to work with and lightweight for



Low-maintenance plants and yellow balau hardwood decking provide a contemporary finish to this balcony, created by Earth Designs. A raised deck platform area with brightly coloured seating is a relaxing place to sit and take in the view

PHOTOGRAPH HARPER GARDEN IMAGES

carrying up several flights. Any joists can be fixed to surrounding walls so the weight gets distributed to the walls and not solely to the roof itself. Choose western red cedar or hardwoods such as ipe or balau (from a sustainable source). They retain their colour, last much longer than softwood decks and look better too. If your roof terrace abuts a room with wooden flooring, use decking of a similar colour to help blur the boundaries between the two.

Most roof terraces are covered in a waterproof membrane, while others have a fireproof layer, so be careful not to puncture them with fixtures and fittings.

### Coping with the elements

Wind is a common problem on roof terraces. Many plants can cope with it, but you might need some shelter if you want to enjoy the space all year. Unless there is protection from surrounding buildings, solid windbreaks aren't a good idea as they block out the view, plus the wind stress on fixings is high. Instead, choose permeable