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# A CHEF'S PARADISE

Clio and Marco wanted to bring a taste of the Med to Chalkwell, and with the help of the Earth Designs team they have brought their vision to life

WORDS BY **LAURA HICKIE** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT**





**W**hen clients Clio and Marco asked the Earth Designs team to revamp the back garden of their Chalkwell home, they had a long wishlist. They used their garden for business and pleasure, so spaces for home working and entertaining were essential.

With young children, it would need to be family-friendly and Marco, a keen chef, dreamt of an outdoor cooking area. But ultimately, they wanted a garden that reminded them of their Mediterranean

**‘With some clever planting design from Garden Designer Kat Kieffer-Wells, dark, heavy borders have made way for pleached trees and long grasses’**

heritage, and embraced their love of food, family and cooking. There were a few practical challenges to overcome. A drastic level change between the house and garden meant a steep drop between the existing deck and lower garden. Large conifers dominated the rear border and overshadowed the lawn.

As a result, the grass was often damp and boggy. A new studio for Clio was a priority. She had been working from an old outdoor building at the back of the garden, but it was inadequate and impractical. She needed a modern workspace from which to make her jewellery and run her growing business. A proper studio-office that could also accommodate Marco working from home more often.

The children needed room to run and play, which drew Marco and Clio towards a traditional layout of a lawn area surrounded by borders. But they liked natural rather than formal planting. A slightly wild and rugged landscape to remind them of their Italian roots.

There were a lot of boxes to tick, but much thought has gone into making this garden a versatile space that works for the entire family. From the design layout, to planting choices and practical solutions.

Like the newly raised deck that makes stepping down from the house a doddle. Not only have they replaced old wooden decking with new, but the yellow Balau timber picks up the golden afternoon light, giving ➔





it a warm, inviting glow. From there you get a panoramic view of the garden, and a lot has changed. But what's most immediately obvious is the light. Gone are the overgrown conifers and in their place beautiful, dappled sunlight pours over the lawn. With some clever planting design from garden designer Kat Kieffer-Wells, dark, heavy borders have made way for pleached trees and long grasses. Providing privacy and playful, semi-transparent layers, without blocking the light.

The lawn is now lush, and giant planters are home to spiky tropical leaves and olive trees. Artificial grass has solved the soggy bog problem. Providing a soft place to play all year round, without having to deal with muddy footprints. While beds and borders contain evergreen shrubs and herbaceous perennials that look great, but require little attention.

**C**lio's new studio stands proudly to one side. It's a large, modern, timber structure that could easily dominate the space. But they have positioned it to feel like an extension of the house, blending seamlessly into the decking. Pale timber walls reflect light back onto the lawn. While large windows, allow for an airy interior, with a lovely working view of the garden.

Clio confirms the new outdoor office has changed her home working life completely.

"Having a dedicated area that looks cool as well as being functional makes working from home fab! Plus, the walk to work is ever so pleasant - and not boggy!"

Next to the studio there's now a dedicated play area. The children's slide hidden among tall flowers. While much-needed storage lies concealed beneath the deck, accessed by secret doors in rusted steel panels. Creating a design feature, as well as a practical solution.

Probably the most significant addition to the garden, however, is the new outdoor kitchen. Despite taking up an entire corner, it looks at home, surrounded by trees and vines. Pale, stone work-surfaces look stunning against the foliage and there's a sleek stainless steel sink, built-in BBQ, fridge and hob. It's beautifully equipped, but the crowning glory has to be the pizza oven dreams are made of!

When I asked Clio what their favourite thing to do in their new garden was, her first answer was "Eat pizza in our outdoor kitchen." And it's easy to imagine the many pizza-based memories being made here.

## 'Having a dedicated area that looks cool as well as being functional makes working from home fab'

As you may have gathered, cooking, eating and entertaining are big in this household.

Marco loves to cook, but it goes much deeper than that. Clio and Marco's Mediterranean heritage puts cooking and eating together at the heart of family life. What makes this garden special, is that Kat has recognised and reflected that in every thoughtful detail.

"Every corner of the garden is used now, the flow makes it easy. From the home studio and workspace for me, outdoor kitchen for my husband and play area for the kids."

For Marco, fresh ingredients are at his fingertips. To be plucked straight from the garden and put into the pot. Like the centre of the bespoke dining table, for instance, where herbs grow in a specially designed steel trough. Or the sunniest border in the garden, that's stuffed with more herbs and fruit trees. But it's not just a food lover's paradise.

It's a homely, comfortable place designed for enjoying life together. Bringing culture and creativity together to create a little taste of the Mediterranean in urban Essex.

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