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FACT FILE

THE OWNERS

a management consultant, and a media lawyer (below), live here with children

THE PROPERTY

A five-bedroom terraced house, built in the 1880s

THE LOCATION

Tufnell Park, north London

WHAT THEY SPENT

The couple's garden project cost around £42,000

BEFORE



ORIGINAL GARDEN

Above A traditional rectangular lawn surrounded by shrubs didn't entice and to spend much time outside

NEW LOOK

Right Getting the layout right was key for views from above, and a diagonal design creates the illusion of a wider garden

'A themed design has transformed our outdoor space'

structural contemporary garden completes the family home

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **MARCUS HARPUR**

Soon after moving into our house, we had the basement dug out,' explains 'We had also wanted a glass box extension to the rear, but altered the plans and built a glass wall looking out from the living room onto the garden. We then had excellent views from the rooms we used the most, and realised that the house seemed incomplete without a garden that we wanted to use.'

and husband previous garden had been bigger, with less hard landscaping. 'This one is quite large by London standards, which was one of the reasons we came

here,' says 'I liked the idea of switching to a formal, structured town garden, but still using plenty of plants to soften the design.'

The space started as a blank canvas, with only a lawn, some raised beds and a shed, so in order to better organise it, the couple called on Katrina Kieffer-Wells of Earth Designs after saw her work on Facebook. A theme and a sketch were then agreed in a single consultation. 'I like to evolve ideas alongside the client, so that they have ownership of the concept and can agree or disagree with ideas straight away,' says Katrina. 'I also try to reflect the





REAL GARDENS



STATEMENT STRUCTURE

Above The Japanese-style pergola was custom-built and is a great vantage point for garden views while dining. The sharp right angles are softened by the round lamps and stone balls

style of their home – kitchen is a glossy monochrome design, and I wanted the garden to have that feel.’

The family had specific requirements for it: ‘ is an avid gardener and wanted to include plenty of plants, and it had to be a family space with a practical area.

is a keen photographer and often uses the garden as subject matter, while the couple’s daughter was keen to try growing her own vegetables, so there are raised beds. Above all, they wanted a place where they could relax and entertain.

desired oriental look was achieved with the layout, structures, and the choice of plants, which are mainly Japanese in origin. Katrina made up mood boards, including images of fire escapes and David Bowie’s *Aladdin Sane* album cover, and elements of these ideas were expressed in the angles of the paths and paving. With the style agreed, the project went fairly smoothly and kept within the budget, with only the particularly wet winter of 2012 delaying progress, stretching it to four months. The ground needed to be levelled, although, fortunately, major groundworks weren’t necessary, as everything had to be carried through the house – except the birch trees, which ▶



GARDEN ART

Above Looking back to the house from under a tree, treasured Three Figures sculptures are surrounded by alliums and heuchera for shade at this end of the garden

SECLUDED SPOT

Right Rattan furniture and an aluminium café-style table and chairs are perfect for the sun trap at the end of the garden, with smooth black paviours adding to the dynamic

had to be passed over neighbouring gardens due to their large size.

As Katrina explains, the garden is visible from four levels, so the design had to be very precise. 'If you don't get the spacing right, you lose the impact in a small town garden,' adds Hilary. The diagonal angles of the garden create the most striking feature. The path, geometric lawn and hard landscaping are set at around 40 degrees to the boundary walls, serving two functions – it gives the garden a dynamic feel and journeys to both sides, making the most of the space. The design also visually pushes out the narrow boundaries for a widening effect.

From the house, the focal point – and favourite feature of the garden – is her Three Figures sculpture by Kathy Shadwell. Spotted in a Sussex shop window, they add an international flavour to the garden and accent the oriental theme. Hilary particularly loves the wooden pergola near the house that overlooks the whole scene, and which solved an early problem of a large, over-reaching mulberry tree; the highly staining black fruit now drop on the pergola roof instead. There is a stylistic reflection of the pergola at the far end, where glossy black Perspex panels have been used almost as a fence, perfectly offsetting the stark white stems of the birch



trees, which not only hide the shed, but give the garden a sense of grandeur. A seating area with rattan chairs and aluminium furniture adds further to the contemporary feel. 'The terrace at the far end is nowhere near the house or any neighbours, so it gets sun all day, and is a real draw,' she says.

Hilary is delighted by how well her plant choices have settled in. Anem lilies have been particularly vigorous and she has given away many *Clerodendrum trichotomum* seedlings. Her favourite buy is a Japanese dwarf *Prunus incisa* 'Kojo-no-mai', with its profusion of pink-tinged-white bell-shaped blooms, bought for £3 at a local garden opening. Japanese maples grow at key intersections, and the garden is mostly monochrome, so a lot of the planting features white flowers

in contrast with black stone, Perspex and woodwork. Hilary has planted *Dicentra spectabilis* 'Alba', hellebores and the giant *rheum palmatum* in the shady border.

Two other design features unify the whole garden: black granite setts, pebbles and gravel are used in bands at right angles, contrasted with pale-coloured slabs and paviours to give a sharp, graphic feel. This monochrome scheme fits well with the oriental theme and is visually exciting, but, as a subtle contrast to the straight lines, sandstone and luminous plastic balls are positioned along the entire length, drawing the eye through the space. 'We recently had a gathering of 80 people, and the garden was a real asset,' says Hilary. 'It made the party.' ■



SCREENING

Above Reflective black Perspex panels give a contemporary, sophisticated and enclosed feel to the terrace seating area

at the far end of the garden, also disguising the shed. Stepping stones leading up to a small gravel garden create a sense of journey

THE PLANS

AFTER



The garden is divided into different zones, with the diagonal design acting to enhance the width of the long plot. Planting creates secluded areas for privacy

THE COSTS

Paving	£12,035
VAT	£7,059
Planting	£4,743
Pergola	£3,828
Lighting	£3,474
Sundries	£2,826
Perspex screens	£2,438
Clearance and preparation	£2,304
Bespoke water feature	£1,519
Raised bed	£1,425
Lawn	£705
TOTAL	£42,356

THE CONTACTS

Design and construction Earth Designs, 020 8521 9040, earthdesigns.co.uk
Paving MR International, 01375 855678, mrinternational.co.uk
Granite setts and paving Rock Unique
Lights and illuminated planters Slide Design
Plants Folia (Europe)

REAL GARDENS

Project notes

shares her experience of creating an elegant town garden

What I've learnt

'Don't underestimate how long it takes to plan a successful garden design. Think very hard before you start so you achieve what you want, rather than rushing into it.'

My top tip

'Be realistic about what you can achieve when access is limited. Get the layout right - we found that in a town garden, the horticultural part is not as crucial as the layout; if you get that and the framework right, everything else will fall into place, so leave the planting until that is done. Set a realistic budget from the outset and make compromises if necessary. We'd also recommend working with a designer if possible.'

My best purchase

'This is my Three Figures sculpture, by Kathy Shadwell, which I bought in Sussex, plus the pergola. Our designer Katrina's favourite is the black Perspex panels and silver birch combination, which bring grandeur and glamour to the space.'

My go-to stores

'We like to use flower bulb specialists Jacques Amand International and the Gee Tee Bulb company, and our designer introduced us to the products of design company Slide Design.'

I couldn't live without...

'...our raised vegetable beds, as our daughter enjoys growing her own veg.'

Inspirational reads

'We found *The Essential Garden Book* by Terence Conran and Dan Pearson (£18, Octopus) very useful, and magazines, such as *Gardens Illustrated*, help to inspire a design. Katrina recommended *The Modern Japanese Garden* by Michiko



Above Box-edged beds sit inside the angles of the hard landscaping. This one holds one of favourite Japanese maples, which has strong saturated colour



Right brought her favourite ceramic sculpture with her from her old garden, and it fits perfectly with the new scheme

Rico Nose and Michael Freeman (£15, Tuttle) for introducing Japanese elements into our garden.'

My favourite spot

'The seating area at the far end of the garden is a great place to relax as it always catches the sun.'