

# SITTING PRETTY

Natural stone paving, colourful screens, textural planting and understated furniture combine to create this stylish urban garden in south London



**DESIGNER PROFILE** A former opera singer, John Davies swapped the stage for a career in garden design, gaining a distinction from the London College of Garden Design. He set up his own practice in 2010 and specialises in chic urban designs. This one was shortlisted in the Small Budget category of the 2015 Society of Garden Designers Awards.

## What was the brief for this new garden?

The clients live in a Georgian terraced property in south London and, although the original garden was nice, they wanted a space that would complement the newly refurbished house, and give them somewhere to eat and entertain friends. It was a loose brief – they entrusted me with the whole planting design and overall concept.

## How did the site affect your design?

The garden faces south west, which would usually create a sunny space, but a steep bank at the end of the plot cast it in shade. The bank was covered in weeds and rough grass, which needed to be disguised, as did an old retaining wall. On the positive side, the previous owners had been gardeners, so the soil was perfect for planting. Access was tricky, so we brought the plants and extra soil through the house and used a crane to transport a solid stone step via the neighbour's garden.

## Can you tell us what inspired your design ideas?

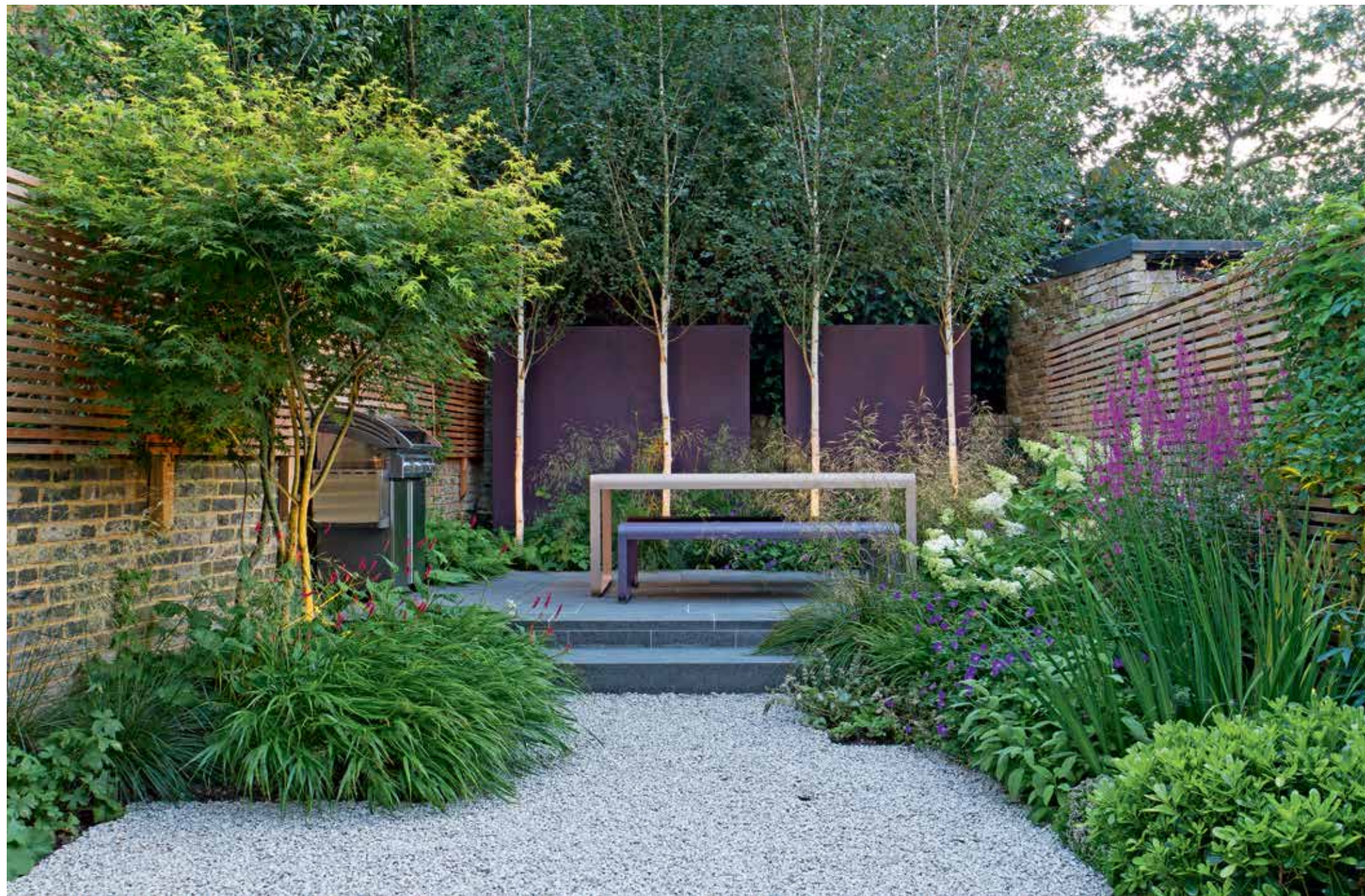
I love the small contemporary gardens found in Holland and Belgium, which combine modern materials and structural planting to create stylish spaces. I also find that offsetting the symmetry – creating two sides that are similar but not identical – gives a dynamic look to the design. With that in mind, I used clean, simple geometric shapes for the terraces and flower borders, and replaced the old pond with a rectangular pool, which is set close to the house.

## How did you create the lush planting effect?

I chose plants with good structure, leaf shape or bark interest, rather than for their colour. When choosing trees for a small garden, I look for those with light, airy canopies that will not provide too much shade – the Himalayan birches here are ideal. Or try multi-stemmed forms, such as the Japanese maple on the left, which will stay compact if you trim it every year or two. I have also included grasses for their flowing foliage and delicate flowerheads, a compact *Pittosporum* that makes a mound of evergreen leaves, and tall spires of purple *Lythrum*, which combine beautifully with the hydrangea's white cone-like blooms behind.

## What tips do you have for dealing with garden boundaries?

In a small garden, the boundaries need a lot of thought, as they can be seen so clearly from the house. Either cover them with planting to blur the edges or, as I have done here, make them appear to recede. I have disguised the unsightly retaining wall at the back with two



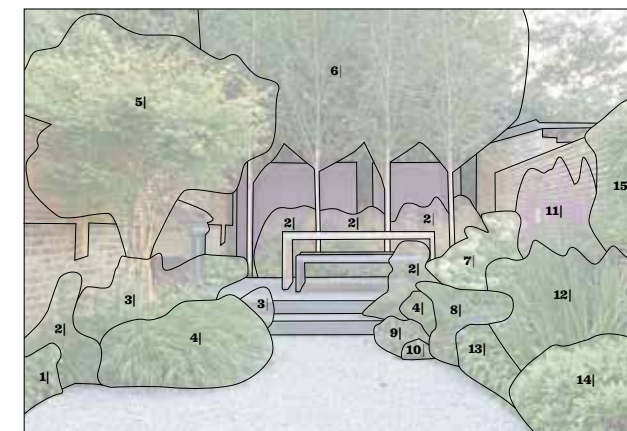
rectangular panels, painted in a rich purple-brown to create a striking feature. These coloured panels make the old wall disappear into the shadows while providing a foil for the planting, making it spring out visually and increasing the impact of the feathery grasses and birch trees. The slatted fences on the adjacent walls look more natural, blend well with the planting and allow in light.

## What floor treatments would you recommend for small areas?

I'm not a big fan of lawns in small spaces; they often take up the whole garden and can make it feel smaller. Here, I've paved the upper terrace with basalt – a natural, durable stone that is dark grey when wet and fades to a lighter grey when dry. To keep the paving looking good for longer, we also applied a barrier product, while the silver-grey granite chippings on the lower terrace create a beautiful textural contrast with the paving and reflect light into the garden.

INTERVIEW ZIA ALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHS JOHN DAVIES (MAIN PHOTOGRAPH) HELEN JERMYN (PORTRAIT)

“ I find that offsetting the symmetry – creating two sides that are similar but not identical – gives a dynamic look to the design.”



## KEY PLANTS

- 1| *Astrantia major* 'Alba'.
- 2| *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau'.
- 3| *Persicaria amplexicaulis* Taurus ('Blotau').
- 4| *Hakonechloa macra*.
- 5| *Acer palmatum*.
- 6| *Betula utilis jacquemontii* (Himalayan birch).
- 7| *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'.
- 8| *Geranium Rozanne* ('Gerwat.')
- 9| *Salvia verticillata* 'Purple Rain'.
- 10| *Origanum vulgare* (marjoram).
- 11| *Lythrum virgatum* 'Dropmore Purple'.
- 12| *Iris* 'Perry's Blue'.
- 13| *Salvia officinalis* (sage).
- 14| *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum'.
- 15| *Akebia quinata* (chocolate vine).

## PLANT SUPPLIERS

**Burncoose Nurseries.**  
01209 860316,  
[burncoose.co.uk](http://burncoose.co.uk).  
**Claire Austin Hardy Plants.**  
01686 670342,  
[claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk](http://claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk).  
**Whitewater Nursery and Plant Centre.**  
0118 932 6487,  
[whitewaterplantcentre.co.uk](http://whitewaterplantcentre.co.uk).

## LANDSCAPE SUPPLIERS

The **upper terrace** is paved with basalt and the **lower terrace** with silver-grey 14mm granite aggregate, both from CED, 01708 867237, [ced.ltd.uk](http://ced.ltd.uk). The **slatted fencing panels** are made from western red cedar from Silva Timber, 020 8150 8055, [silvatimber.co.uk](http://silvatimber.co.uk), and the **coloured screens** are marine plywood painted in Weathershield Exterior Quickdry Satin in Maraschino Mocha 3 from Dulux, 0333 222 7171, [dulux.co.uk](http://dulux.co.uk). The **Bellevie table and bench** are by Fermob from Hortus, 020 8297 9439, [hortus-london.com](http://hortus-london.com), and the **Triumph Range barbecue** is from Napoleon, 01676 522788, [napoleongrills.co.uk](http://napoleongrills.co.uk).

## GARDEN DESIGN

**John Davies.** 020 7732 9233,  
[johndavieslandscape.co.uk](http://johndavieslandscape.co.uk).



