

BOTANICAL STUDIES

Created for a novice gardener keen to learn more about plants, this handkerchief-sized plot offers a striking lesson in the use of space



DESIGNER PROFILE Horticulturalist Stephen Smith is a plant expert and landscape historian with 37 years' experience. He has an MA in Garden History and a Diploma in the Conservation of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens. He also advises and lectures on historic gardens, as well as designing private spaces.

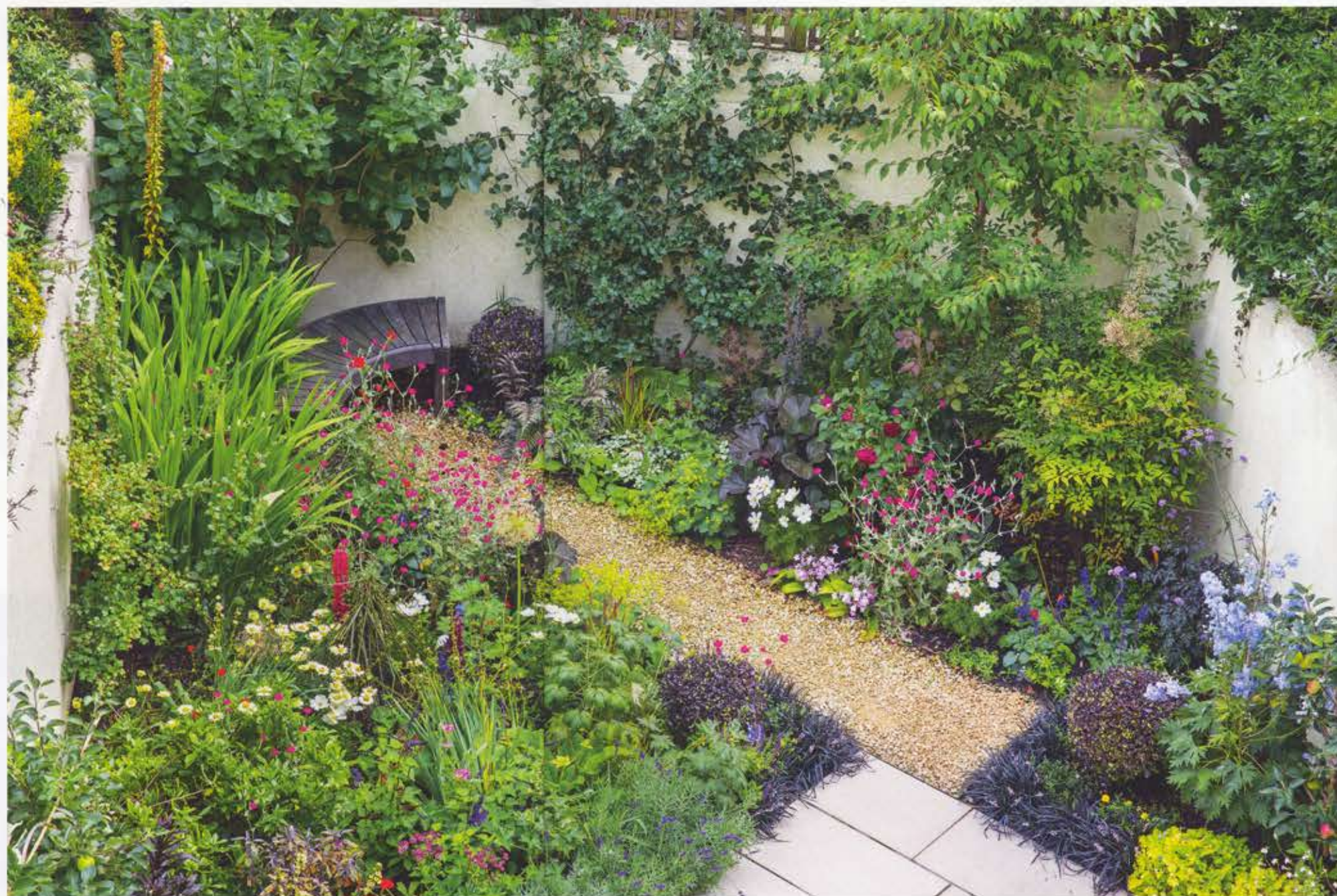
WHAT WAS YOUR BRIEF FOR THE GARDEN? This was a friend's very first garden and he asked me to create a design that would allow him to learn more about plants. He also wanted it to look fantastic in June, when he hosts his annual birthday party, and to provide a place where he and friends can play bridge in the summer. Like me, he loves traditional gardens but also wanted the design to have a contemporary edge.

DID THE SITE POSE ANY CHALLENGES? Although this London garden is tiny and overlooked by town houses, it is south facing and the soil is good, probably as a result of previous owners improving it over the years. Despite its limited proportions, I was keen that the design would convey a journey. This led to the diagonal layout, with planting softening the boundaries and masking the view from the back door to the end of the plot, creating an element of discovery as you travel through the space to the bench at the end.

WHAT INFLUENCED YOUR PLANTING CHOICES? I love the formal structure of historic gardens, but decided not to use box topiary, which can succumb to blight. Instead, I've included clipped globes of *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb', a beautiful dark-leaved plant, which function as full stops at either end of the gravel path. The climbers and trees that cover the sand-coloured walls add structure while taking up very little ground space. Roses, a *Garrya elliptica* and a slim birch tree, the canopy of which screens the neighbour's windows, also add to the framework. The client asked for a lilac tree, too, which I planted behind the bench to act as a sort of bower; a beautiful *Clematis* 'Étoile de Hollande' climbs up it and flowers in late summer. The triangular beds created by the diagonal layout receive sun and some shade, providing the ideal conditions for a range of perennials and annuals.

WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO USE PLANT COLOUR? For the best results, choose a couple of key colours to hold the scheme together. Here, I have combined purple and yellow, with *Heuchera* 'Lime Rickey', the yellow blooms of *Alchemilla mollis* and *Ligularia*, and purple-leaved *Pittosporum* dotted throughout the design. Also include muted hues and green foliage, but don't use too many shades or your scheme will look messy. An injection of brighter colours, such as pinks and reds, will provide accents and look great when repeated throughout a border.

WHAT IS THE KEY TO SUSTAINING THIS TYPE OF DESIGN? As it is a small garden, many of the perennials will need to be lifted and divided every couple of years in early autumn or spring to prevent them from

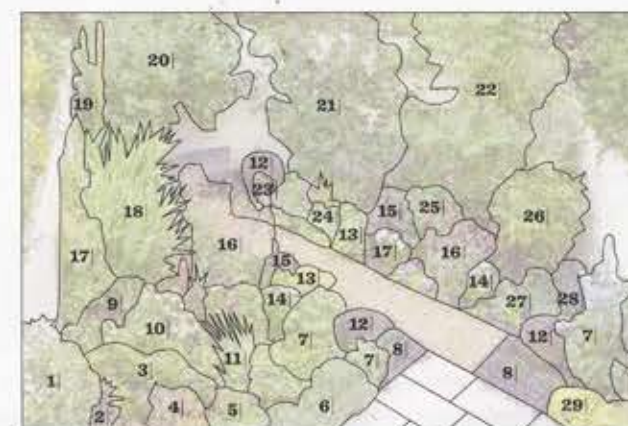


outgrowing their space. If dividing in autumn, you can add some spring bulbs to the scheme at the same time. Also watch out for slugs; my client hunts them down each night. An easier solution is to use pellets sparingly around vulnerable plants, such as lupins and delphiniums. The *Pittosporum* globes need a light trim every year, too.

CAN YOU RECOMMEND SOME RESILIENT PERENNIALS? The bright pink or white *Lychnis coronaria* is a wonderful plant for any scheme with free-draining soil in full sun or partial shade. *Anthemis tinctoria* 'EC Buxton' produces pale yellow daisies over a long period, while a good option for light shade is *astrantia*, which flowers all summer and comes on a choice of red, pink and white. The Japanese painted fern is an excellent counterpoint to the flowers, its silvery leaves and red stalks offering textural interest from spring to autumn. □

INTERVIEW ZIA ALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHY MARIANNE MAJERUS

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KEY PLANTS

- 1| *Malus domestica* 'Discovery'
- 2| *Lobelia cardinalis* 'Queen Victoria'
- 3| *Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata'
- 4| *Salvia officinalis* 'Purpureosens'
- 5| *Astrantia major* 'Hatspen Blood'
- 6| *Lavandula* 'Imperial Gem'
- 7| *Delphinium*
- 8| *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens'
- 9| *Geum* 'Mrs J Bradshaw'
- 10| *Anthemis tinctoria* 'EC Buxton'
- 11| *Sisyrinchium striatum*
- 12| *Pittosporum* 'Tom Thumb'
- 13| *Alchemilla mollis*
- 14| *Cosmos* 'White'
- 15| *Ligularia dentata* 'Midnight Lady'
- 16| *Lychnis coronaria*
- 17| *Ribes speciosum*
- 18| *Crococsmia* 'Lucifer'
- 19| *Alcea rosea* (hollyhock)
- 20| *Syringa* 'Katherine Havemeyer'
- 21| *Garrya elliptica*
- 22| *Betula albosinensis* var. *septentrionalis*
- 23| *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*
- 24| *Lamium maculatum* 'White Nancy'
- 25| *Rosa* 'Munstead Wood'
- 26| *Nandina domestica*
- 27| *Salvia* 'Black and Blue'
- 28| *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Landaff'
- 29| *Heuchera* 'Lime Rickey'

WHERE TO BUY

Neal's Nurseries, Capital Gardens, 020 8874 2037, capitalgardens.co.uk
Clockhouse Nursery, 020 8363 1016, clockhousenursery.co.uk
Sunshine Garden Centre, 020 8889 4224, sunshinergardencentre.co.uk
Majestic Trees, 01582 843881, majestictrees.co.uk

LANDSCAPING

The **patio** is paved with Haus Dune Smooth. The **path** is laid with Cotswold gravel. The curved **bench** is made from oak.

WHERE TO BUY

Stonemarket, 0345 302 0603, stonemarket.co.uk
Stone Warehouse, 01629 636212, stonewarehouse.co.uk
Gaze Burvill, 01420 588444, gazeburvill.com

CONTACT DETAILS

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