

THINK BIG

Giant pavers and colourful borders have transformed this small town garden from a muddy, unusable space into a leafy oasis



DESIGNER PROFILE Having gained a degree in photography, Adam Shepherd worked as a freelance magazine designer before turning to gardens. He set up his own landscape design business in 2006, and is known for contemporary gardens that blend modern materials with bold planting schemes.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE SPACE AND YOUR BRIEF? The garden is long and narrow. It's attached to a town house, with the living room on the first floor leading out on to a raised terrace, and an extended kitchen on the ground floor below. My clients are a young couple with a child. They wanted easy access to the garage at the end of the site without having to walk through mud when it rains. They also asked for a garden that their dog wouldn't destroy, and which the family could enjoy year round.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE DESIGN? When I first visited the clients, the garden was a muddy mess and the dog's playing had made it almost unusable. My solution was to remove the lawn, and to use paving to keep the space clean. Instead of trying to disguise the plot's awkward shape, I decided to embrace its length and narrow width by putting a path down the middle and, inspired by the double border at RHS Wisley, to put a wide border on either side. The raised beds close to the kitchen add height to the design, while the bespoke stainless-steel staircase that leads to the first-floor terrace makes an eye-catching statement. Despite throwing out the rule book on designing a small garden, somehow it really works and the clients love it.

WHAT WERE YOUR INSPIRATIONS? I like to think of my gardens as stage sets, and this one is like a catwalk, with the drainage channels on either side of the path resembling the edge of a runway. The planting scheme was inspired by the way nurseries set out their plants in rows, with the shorter ones at the front and tallest at the back, which I always think looks fantastic.

HOW HAVE YOU MADE THIS GARDEN FEEL PRIVATE? I always believe it's best not to get too hung up about privacy in a town garden, and to accept that you'll be overlooked a little bit. Here, I've made the garden feel secluded by cocooning it with a number of trees, including the tall cherry at the centre, a Himalayan birch in one of the raised beds, and two *Acer palmatum* (Japanese maples) at the end. These combine to create a light, leafy canopy that masks the garden without plunging it into darkness.

CAN YOU SHARE THE TRICKS YOU USE TO MAKE A COMPACT SPACE SEEM LARGER? When designing a small garden, think big: it may seem counter-intuitive, but it works. Here, I've used huge slabs of slate, which make the garden feel spacious and expansive. The borders are also big and bold, and populated with large plants,



such as rhododendrons, yew, tall grasses and blocks of leafy perennials. I would also think carefully about including lawns in small gardens, as they can look a bit apologetic when squeezed into a narrow space.

WHAT DICTATED YOUR CHOICE OF PLANTS? Again, the size of the space was a deciding factor; in a small area, you need to have a group of plants that will look good all year round as they are always on display. However, I steer away from using evergreens alone, as they can look too static and sombre when planted en masse. Here, I've combined evergreens and deciduous plants that peak in different seasons – bulbs and blossom in spring, flowers in summer, and plants to provide late colour in autumn, such as rudbeckias, persicarias and decorative grasses, including *Calamagrostis*, the feather reed grass. □



KEY PLANTS

- 1 | *Betula utilis jacquemontii* (Himalayan birch)
- 2 | *Akebia quinata*
- 3 | *Liriope muscari*
- 4 | *Hedera helix* (ivy)
- 5 | *Erigeron karvinskianus*
- 6 | *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Firetail'
- 7 | *Pittosporum tenuifolium*
- 8 | *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' (Japanese maple)
- 9 | *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' (feather reed grass)
- 10 | *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Roses'
- 11 | *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna'
- 12 | *Prunus 'Shirofugen'* (cooper-leaved cherry)
- 13 | *Tetrapanax papyrifer* 'Rex'

WHERE TO BUY

Paramount Plants and Gardens, 020 8367 8809, paramountplants.co.uk
Burncoose Nurseries, 01209 860316, burncoose.co.uk
Crocus, 01344 578000, crocus.co.uk
Deepdale Trees, 01767 262636, deepdale-trees.co.uk

HARD LANDSCAPING MATERIALS

The path is paved with **Brazilian black slate**. Raised beds are clad in **ipe hardwood**. Trellis screens are in **western red cedar**. Bespoke staircase is by **Hollywood Design**.

WHERE TO BUY

Mandarin Stone, 01600 715444, mandarinstone.com
Champion Timber, 020 8949 1621, championtimber.com
Silva Timber Products, 01895 271300, silvatimber.co.uk
Hollywood Design, 020 7249 1234, hollywood-design.com

CONTACT DETAILS

Adam Shepherd
The Landscape Architect
Garden Design Consultancy
07875 203901
thelandscapearchitect.net

“

I think of my gardens as stage sets, and this one is like a catwalk, with the drainage channels resembling the edge of a runway”

INTERVIEW ZIA ALLAWAY
PHOTOGRAPHY MAGGIE MAJERUS

