

TOWN GARDEN

Herbal REMEDY

Rescued from its former state as a muddy building site, this verdant city plot now has all the charm of a traditional culinary knot garden

WORDS CAROLINE BECK PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS



The central herb garden comprises five interlinked box-edged ovals planted with bay, rosemary and lavender, and punctuated with annual pink cosmos for summer colour.



The rill is flanked by rows of spiky, sculptural agaves, their blue-green colour echoing the water's tone.

Plants and builders make poor partners; but, sometimes, there is no getting round it. You plan a small project and the workers arrive, bringing with them not only machinery and materials but, inevitably, foul weather too. As they proceed, the heavens open, and the plot that you imagined would somehow survive unscathed is transformed into a muddy pit, your beloved plants damaged and probably lost beyond return.

You despair and curse the day you ever decided to build. Garden designers are, mercifully, less prone to such vapours. The churned up quagmire that your garden has become is meat and drink to them, a blank canvas for their creative schemes. Which is fortunate for Katherine Winter, whose north London garden was in dire need of rescue after a basement for her house had been excavated. She had wanted a garden of herbs, fruit and beauty, but was left instead with something resembling a swamp.

Responding to her distress call, award-winning garden designer Bunny Guinness stepped in to transform the mess into a beautiful space dominated by green with bright highlights. Her clever sleight-of-hand included blurring the boundaries between the garden's periphery and the landscape of mature trees beyond, making the area look considerably larger than its 50 by 65 feet.

"Before I visit, I ask my clients to think about what they would like their outdoor space to be," says Bunny. Katherine, an American academic, took this seriously and did extensive research. She wanted an English garden, underpinned by order and pattern, a place in which to grow herbs and fruit: "My husband says that I'm happiest when I'm outside picking things." The couple also wanted a private and peaceful place, that felt more rural than urban, in which to relax.

Today, the focus of the design is a box-edged herb garden of five interlocking ovals – a quincunx – planted with rosemary, standard bay and lavender. This feature can be seen from the house and, with its evergreen matrix, provides pattern in all seasons. It is bordered by a low brick framework topped by cedar coping, which doubles as a seat, an ideal spot from which to brush one's fingers through aromatic herbs.

"I wanted fragrance and something to cook with," says Katherine, so alongside the formal herb garden are mint, parsley, oregano, tarragon and thyme planted in gravel or growing in pots. Herbs can be fickle in English gardens, always wanting better drainage and more sun than our climate can provide, but Katherine's delight in this space is obvious. "I'm from New York City, so I never take any of this for granted," she says.

Katherine wanted fruit trees too, so Bunny bought some handsome multi-stemmed medlars, a relative of



Broad, shallow stone steps lead through mixed planting of perennials and herbs complemented by mounds of clipped box.



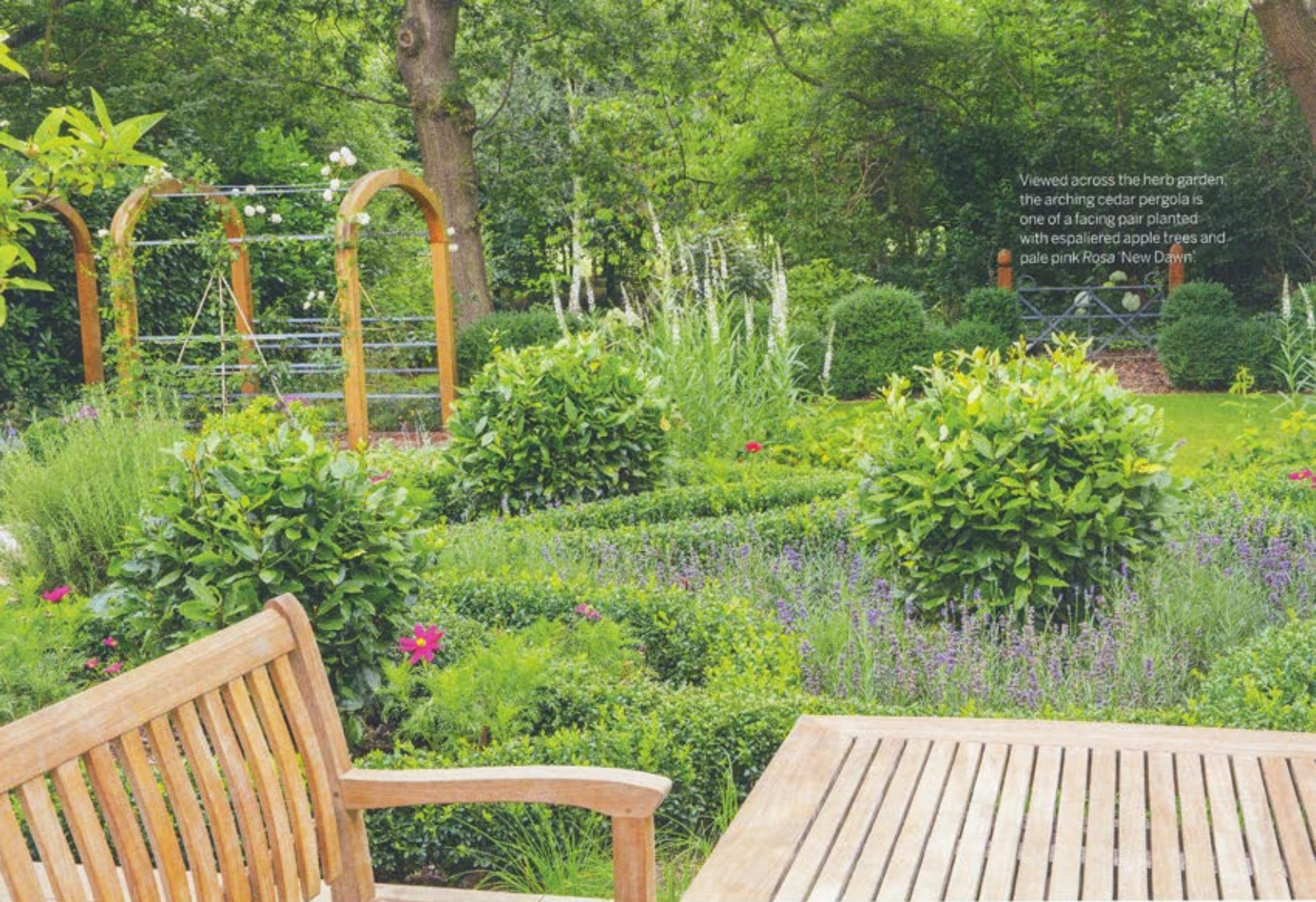
A decorative iron grill, disguising the basement's air conditioning, blends beautifully into the garden's design.



Pots of soft-blue dwarf agapanthus add height and interest set along the top of the low brick wall beside the rill.



White highlights, including tall spires of *Lysimachia*, *ephemerum* and generous mopheads of hydrangea, draw the eye to the gate.



Viewed across the herb garden, the arching cedar pergola is one of a facing pair planted with espaliered apple trees and pale pink *Rosa* 'New Dawn'.

the quince, for their seasonal display of blossom, golden autumn foliage and spicy smelling fruit; they have been given prominence in painted Versailles planters. Over the cedar pergola, Bunny has trained *Rosa* 'New Dawn' and espaliered apple trees, which will eventually form an archway linking one area of the garden to another. The supple bark of young apple trees is perfect for this living sculpture; in winter, the textured bare branches are revealed, followed by spring blossom which attracts pollinating insects.

The view from the house has not been forgotten either. From the kitchen's French windows, a simple rectangular rill, which is flanked by terracotta pots filled with agaves, directs the eye to the lushness of the garden.

What was once a pit of mud is now a space where the couple loves to sit and watch visiting birds and insects, and the fallow deer that roam beyond the garden at twilight. Plants have healed this place. □

GARDEN GUIDE

Orientation The garden faces west.

Soil type All the soil for the raised beds and containers was brought on to the site.

Special features The garden is small, but highly structured with a geometric pattern of clipped box forming the framework of a decorative herb garden.

Garden design Bunny Guinness Landscape Design, 01780 782518, bunnyguinness.com.



ILLUSTRATION SCOTT JESSOP