

A FINE ROMANCE

Inspired by country schemes, this flower-filled haven is designed to delight throughout the year, leaving the city streets far behind



DESIGNER PROFILE A qualified horticulturist, Claire Mee began designing gardens in the early 1990s, following a career in the fashion industry. She has gained an enviable reputation for beautifully planted contemporary designs, ranging from large suburban gardens to compact courtyards. Her work has appeared in many books and magazines.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID THIS GARDEN PRESENT? Although the garden is large by London standards, it is awkwardly shaped and narrows at the end; in fact, on my first visit, it reminded me of a railway line receding into the distance. I needed to make it look more balanced and to prevent the eye being drawn straight to the fence at the back. To mask the shape of the plot, I positioned a pair of deep symmetrical beds close to the house and staggered two timber frames around the mid-point of the lawn. Finally, I widened the lawn on one side towards the end of the garden. The clients had already addressed the fact that the space is overlooked by putting in a tall pleached hornbeam hedge underplanted with *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (star jasmine).

WHAT DID THE CLIENTS' BRIEF INVOLVE? They wanted a pretty garden filled with flowers; a design that would provide interest all year round. I asked them to look through some books for inspiration and they tagged pictures showing gravel areas, lawns, roses, sweet peas and tulips; the ingredients of a traditional English country garden.

HOW DID YOU ACHIEVE THIS LOOK? With the hard landscaping in place, I selected the plants for the beds, using structural plants to create a permanent framework: topiary box balls and cubes, herbs such as rosemary and sage, and small trees, including standard myrtles and Japanese acers. Two of the beds are outlined with stepover apples, which have beautiful spring blossom followed by fruit later in the year. The timber frames will eventually be covered with wisteria, creating walls of leaves and twisted stems, together with large panicles of scented flowers in late spring. Between the shrubs and trees, I've planted masses of spring bulbs, including tulips and alliums, and summer-flowering David Austin roses, peonies and geraniums, with salvias, verbascums and fuchsias for late-season flowering.

IS THERE SOMEWHERE TO SIT AND RELAX? There are two places: a paved patio immediately outside the house and an area of gravel at the end of the garden. The site faces south-west so the patio tends to be warm and sunny, while the gravel is shaded in summer.

WHICH SPRING BULBS DID YOU USE AND WHY? I love tulips and make my selections based on colour and flower shape. To create the romantic look the clients wanted, I focused on pinks and purples but, whatever colour combination you choose, I advise including dark-purple varieties such as 'Queen of the Night', as well as white or cream, to create highlights and lowlights and to give a sense of depth. I have also used

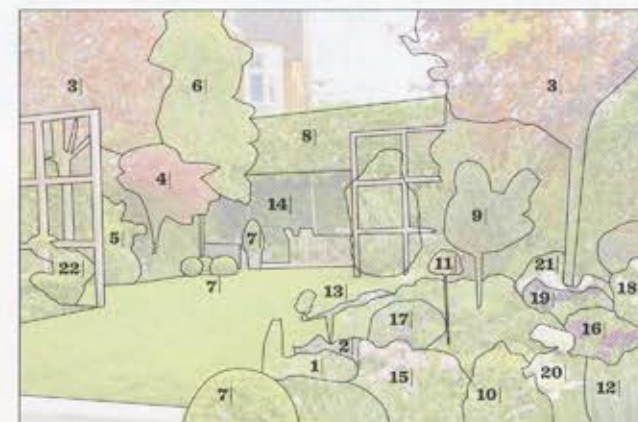


contrasting flower forms such as the feather-edged 'Black Parrot', 'Angélique', a gorgeous pink tulip that resembles a peony, and 'China Town', with its green-tinted, pointed petals. Do choose bulbs with a range of different flowering times so that you can extend the season; the alliums here start to open just as the last of the tulips are fading.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE TREES? The existing trees are subject to preservation orders, but they enhanced the design and I was able to work around them. The new trees needed to have interest through the seasons. The *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' has dark purple leaves in summer, turning fiery red in autumn, while the *Malus x robusta* 'Red Sentinel' has white spring blossom and cherry-red crab apples well into winter. Myrtles are evergreen and can be trimmed to make topiary shapes, with white flowers in spring and black berries in winter. □

INTERVIEW ZIA ALLAWAY
PHOTOGRAPHY MARIANNE MAJERUS

“To create a romantic look for the clients, I focused on pink and purple tulips with contrasting flower forms.”



KEY PLANTS

- 1| *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation'
- 2| *Allium* 'Mount Everest'
- 3| *Acer platanoides* 'Crimson King'
- 4| *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood'
- 5| *Amelanchier lamarckii*
- 6| *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*
- 7| *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa'
- 8| *Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata'
- 9| *Myrtus communis* (common myrtle)
- 10| *Rosa* 'Scepter'd Isle'
- 11| *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll'
- 12| *Rosmarinus officinalis*
- 13| Stepover apples
- 14| *Trachelospermum jasminoides*
- 15| *Tulipa* 'Angélique'
- 16| *Tulipa* 'Black Parrot'
- 17| *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve'
- 18| *Tulipa* 'Maureen'
- 19| *Tulipa* 'Queen of the Night'
- 20| *Tulipa* 'Spring Green'
- 21| *Tulipa* 'White Triumphator'
- 22| *Wisteria sinensis* 'Alba'

ADDITIONAL PLANTS

Ceanothus 'Concha',
Malus x robusta 'Red Sentinel' (crab apple)

WHERE TO BUY

Bluebell Arboretum & Nursery
01530 413700,
bluebellnursery.com
Crocus
01344 578000, crocus.co.uk
Jacques Amand International
020 8420 7110,
jacquesamandint.com

LANDSCAPING AND FURNITURE

The gravel is Cotswold shingle, the patio is beige sawn sandstone, and the frames were built on site, from lpe hardwood.

WHERE TO BUY

London Stone
0844 225 1915,
londonstone.co.uk
Gaze Burvill
01420 588444,
gazeburvill.com
Elmwood fencing
020 8878 0993,
elmwoodfencing.co.uk

CONTACT DETAILS

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