



## pattern DEVELOPMENT

For Neisha Crosland, part of the appeal of a derelict London property was the outside space, but it's taken 20 years for it to evolve into her elegantly zoned garden

TEXT JODIE JONES | PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** On one of the terraces, the dining area has a concrete table and Ron Arad chairs. Outside the sitting room there is a sunken terrace. Assorted stone pots make a pleasing display. Wall buttresses lend height to potted agaves. Neisha at work in front of a wall tiled with her designs

Textile designer Neisha Crosland has always been inspired by nature. Many of her best-known patterns are based on plants, albeit in stylised form. When she began looking for a house, the garden was important, which meant that the property she settled on in south-west London was a far from obvious choice. Off a busy road near Clapham Junction, it wasn't actually a house, but a ramshackle collection of derelict sheds, post-war offices and a garage. Over the past 20 years, however, the potential that Neisha perceived in this awkward site has been perfectly realised. Her home is elegant but welcoming, and every room looks out onto a garden of year-round beauty.

'I had in mind Tuscan terraces, courtyards in Paris and the Peto Garden at Iford Manor

in Wiltshire,' says Neisha. What she has created is a self-contained world that does indeed carry an echo of all these places, interpreted for their urban environment by her friend, the talented plantsman and designer Sean Walter.

The development of both house and garden stretched over several phases dictated by Neisha's finances, career and the needs of her young sons. 'For a long time, the whole garden was in pots,' she recalls. 'Sean and I used to pull them around over the dreadful old concrete until we were happy with their position.'

Today, the layout almost exactly correlates with that early, transient solution. An apron of pitted concrete was lifted and replaced with a rectangle of lawn where balls could be kicked, punctuated by six topiarised holm oaks, >





*Quercus ilex*. The cobbled terrace, now filled with a grid of nine galvanised herb planters, is a refined version of the mismatched stone sets on which Neisha once parked her car.

'All the elements of the garden were here from the outset,' says Sean. 'It was just a question of getting the right plants in the right places.'

To maximise the sense of space in this small plot, it was loosely divided into zones, each with its own character. Outside the sitting room is a sunken terrace from which broad stone steps lead up to the lawn. The dining area is focused on an impressive concrete table and Ron Arad chairs, flanked by pots filled with domes of box.

A column of bay *Laurus nobilis* forms a living wall partitioning off a tiny courtyard. There, two vast pots of rosemary and a swathe of agapanthus form a stylish set piece below an oversize mirror fashioned from an old factory window.

Next to this, a small pagoda – actually part of the basement ventilation system – provides another decorative focal point. Wall panels etched in one of Neisha's own designs flank a rectangle of evergreen *muehlenbeckia*, from which water spouts into a shallow bowl.

Even the outdoor lockers that were built to hide gas meters and other unsightly essentials are pressed into service as a plant theatre, on which Neisha's growing collection of pots is constantly tweaked and adjusted for maximum

effect. There is an olive tree rising from a sheet of black mondo grass, *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens', and a *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' underplanted with deep-purple iris 'Sable'. In the adjoining bed is a swaying haze of bronze fennel, ornamental grasses, alchemilla and zingy orange geums.

'It couldn't all be green!' says Sean. 'I am a plantsman at heart. The trick was working out what would grow in this dry and shady site.'

The walls are covered in robust climbers – *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, *Clematis viticella* and the lovely blush-white rose 'Madame Alfred Carrière'. Espaliered *Pernettya persicaria* fills the gaps between the brick buttresses, topped with agaves in pots, which prop up one garden wall.

One of the first things Sean and Neisha planted was a vine that now covers the house. The main stems are wonderfully thick and gnarly – like hanks of hairy rope binding the building – covered in an undulating mass of leaves that colour magnificently in the autumn.

With the rusted-iron lamp brackets, herb-filled planters and green-framed doors and windows, this really is a garden that could be almost anywhere. Except, perhaps, a busy street in south-west London □

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**THIS PAGE,**  
CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT Pots filled  
with domes of box  
decorate the dining  
area. Water spouts  
into a shallow bowl  
from a rectangle  
of evergreen  
*muehlenbeckia*.  
The lockers hiding  
Neisha's gas meters  
have been turned  
into a charming plant  
theatre. Swaying  
ornamental grasses  
create movement  
among box topiary  
balls. RIGHT Neisha's  
tranquil garden feels  
a world away from its  
urban surroundings

