

Reaching new heights

London's roof gardens are greening-up old houses, new developments and corporate offices

Photographs by Marianne Majerus

AS London's small green spaces are gobbled up by development, so the city's rooftops are turning into sky gardens of remarkable diversity. The advantages of outdoor space and expansive views easily outweigh the potential disadvantages of exposure, wind, added weight and the need for all services to be brought on hand. Planting can be adventurous and exotic. Olive trees, pittosporum, oleander and bamboo create aerial wind filters; tender treasures thrive. Mediterranean species often do well on city roofs, being used to glaring light, desiccating wind and limited opportunities for root expansion. Pots of home-grown herbs are standard fare, but the Coutts Skyline Garden, nurturing some 9,000 edible plants in its linear spaces, takes kitchen gardening to another level in every sense. *KBH*

Right: A gardener's roof garden: in a Victorian neighbourhood with distant City views, this rooftop's glamorous irises are sheltered by dense pines, *Pinus parviflora*. Design: Christopher Bradley-Hole. *Below:* Heat of the moment: columnar olive trees flank an insulated modern chimney and wood-burning stove. Subtle illuminations increase the indoors/outdoors experience. Design: Charlotte Rowe ➤





Above and right: Incredible edibles: some 9,000 culinary plants are raised organically in the linear Skyline roof gardens of Coutts bank's headquarters in the Strand. Design: the late Richard Vine, Coutts's gardener, aided by prisoners at HMP High Down



Below: City illuminations: clipped, standard olive trees rise out of a bed of rosemary. The pared-down design creates an intimate seating area that allows the views to have a starring role. Design: Charlotte Rowe



Above: Conversation piece: a space made for fine evenings and relaxation, surrounded by sheltering oleanders, lilies, hebes and lavender with spiny specimens of *Agave americana* *Mediopicta* and subtle lighting. Design: Amir Schlezinger, MyLandscapes

Right: Shepherd's delight: glass panels of a skylight create the illusion of still pools of water reflecting a sunset worthy of Turner's paintbrush. Evergreens grown in troughs create verdant character and shelter. Design: Amir Schlezinger ➤





Above: Best of fronds: small tree ferns are embedded into a rooftop sea of *Hakonechloa macra*, a low-growing, ornamental grass from Japan, linking visually with the mature tree ferns of the Keeper's House garden at the Royal Academy of Arts. Design: Tom Stuart-Smith. *Garden Fork* by Michael Craig-Martin

Right: Wild side: few city rooftops take up the opportunity to give passing wildlife a helping hand. This one is an exception, with its herbaceous plantings, including bee- and butterfly-attracting teasels (*Dipsacus fullonum*) and *Echinacea purpurea*. Design: Amir Schlezinger, MyLandscapes



Above: Rooftop gardening is about containment, but imaginative planters with integral lighting provide soft illumination without distracting from the views; in this case, landmarks such as the BT Tower and St Pancras Clock Tower. Design: Amir Schlezinger

Right: The entertaining Eye: a Covent Garden roof terrace built for sharing, including outdoor kitchen with sink, worktop and grill with, beyond, areas for dining and relaxation. But can the chef compete with the distraction of the revolving London Eye? Evergreen planting includes a young fan palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*. Design: Amir Schlezinger



Left: Terracotta army: smart, matching chimney pots surmount the stacks of this traditional building, whose hidden roof garden is both restful and productive, with herbs, vegetables and a vine. The shiplap boards enhance its suggestion of a country garden away from city cares. Design: Paul Gazerwitz, del Buono Gazerwitz