

# TEXTURE PLAY

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The architect John Smart's south London garden, designed with Jane Brockbank, is a subtly structured space enhanced by dashes of colour and hard landscaping

From a set of ornate wooden gates on a busy road in south-east London, the architect John Smart's home – a rebuilt coach house – can be tantalisingly glimpsed through a veil of woodland-edge planting. The creamy pink trunks of a grove of *Betula albosinensis* trees tone elegantly with the pink façade and oiled iroko window frames of the house, immediately suggesting that the garden has been carefully considered to work with the architecture. And indeed that is the case, as designer Jane Brockbank was brought in when the project was a building site.

The front garden needed to buffer the house from the road, so the main bed was mounded up in the centre to create a bank of planting. 'John was interested in texture, form and pattern rather than flower colour,' explains Jane. Here the different textures form wavy lines of single species, the pale pink cow parsley *Chaerophyllum hirsutum* 'Roseum' alongside a river of *Luzula nivalis*. More luzula is mixed with *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae* along the brick path leading to the side gate, which opens onto an inner courtyard. The back garden is accessed through the glass doors of the kitchen and dining room, and here Jane was working with an open, sunny site with a backdrop of mature trees.

Initially, John wanted to try having undulating mounds of long grass, with Jane's planting of mainly evergreen shrubs and climbers positioned along the boundary fences. But, after six months, they both agreed that the scheme did not work. 'It's too small a space – 6 metres by 8 metres – for that kind of idea,' says Jane. She was then given free rein to level the garden and reduce the brick paving (the hard landscaping is restricted to different tones of Petersen brick), while leaving space for outdoor eating. She has designed a series of

organically shaped, metal-edged beds to contrast with the linear hard landscaping, filled them with a variety of evergreens, grasses and perennials, and set them in fine gravel.

The white, slatted timber fence was repainted a warm grey brown shade ('Mouse's Back' from Farrow & Ball), a much more successful foil, in Jane's view, for the planting. Although the predominant colour is green, Jane has added tones of burgundy, bruised purple, deep pink and bronze to complement John's striking zig-zag design for the right-hand boundary fence, which is composed of inset steel diagonals in grey and rust.

The overall effect is light and fresh, with repetitions of larger-leaved *Darmera peltata*, *Rodgersia aesculifolia* and tree peonies to ground the scheme. The planting gains height as the season progresses, but the taller plants at the front of the garden, such as *Scabiosa columbaria* subsp. *ochroleuca* and *Sesleria autumnalis*, are airy enough not to obscure the delightful clumps of ground-hugging species. These include *Trifolium repens* 'William', *Lamium maculatum* 'Beacon Silver' and *Acaena microphylla* 'Copper Carpet', which form pools of contrasting foliage three years after planting. A ribbon of *Saxifraga x urbium*, frothy with wands of pale pink flowers in June, provides evergreen texture, along with the *sealaria* and *acaena*, through winter.

This is a garden that embraces change. The apron of fine gravel encourages plants to migrate, and the collection of terracotta pots, which sit on the polished concrete benches at the base of the patterned fence, allows John the chance to experiment with species. Above all it is a garden that celebrates the textures, foliage and colour of an artfully selected range of plants □

Jane Brockbank Gardens:  
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[johnsmartarchitects.co.uk](http://johnsmartarchitects.co.uk)

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT The path to the side gate, which is made from tiles reclaimed from the original house. A grove of *Betula albosinensis* and raised woodland plants screens the house from the road. Semi-shade planting of ferns, *Luzula nivea* and *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum'. Concrete benches create display shelves for pots in the back garden. OPPOSITE Clumps of low planting frame the outdoor dining area

