

Bringing the inside out

Between them, garden designer Jane Brockbank and architect John Smart have unified garden and home

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Garden designer Jane Brockbank describes working on this stylish eye-catching plot at the south-east London home of architect John Smart as “a dream commission”.

“It was very much a collaboration,” she says. “He was open to ideas and prepared to experiment, and if it didn’t work out he was very happy to change it. That is the dream for any designer.”

Actually, in this spirit of evolution and change, this garden is the second version that Jane and John have created here. The first, Jane explains, involved earthworks to create a mounded lawn, but on her return visit six months later, the pair decided it wasn’t working. Or, as Jane puts it: “It looked as if we had buried someone.” John had already installed the garden’s striking fence – a timber and metal zigzag-patterned screen – on the right-hand side, and wanted the garden to be a green antidote. “He wasn’t looking for somewhere for the children to play, room for a shed, or to eat outside,” Jane says. “He just wanted to make a beautiful picture.”

The first step was to set out planting beds, separated by gravel. “It looks as if we have planted directly into the gravel, but actually these are carefully delineated beds, with thin metal edging around each island, then gravel to walk on,” Jane

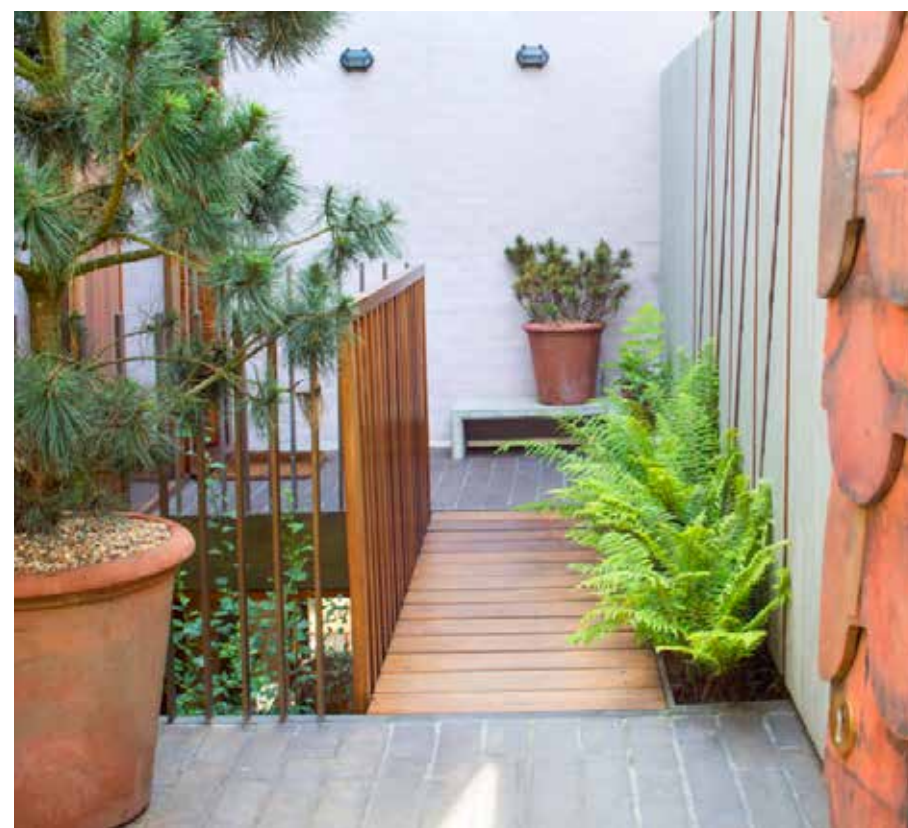
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clarifies. The result is an informal, almost cottage-y feel, as Jane's carefully chosen mix of plants billow out of their beds and soften the hard landscaping. "John wasn't particularly bothered about colour; his main wish was for something textural," Jane notes. "I just needed to get a balance of things that look good all year. I hate that phrase – I think it's rubbish! – but you are staring at this garden in great detail all year round, so it needs a balance of evergreens and an interesting skeleton over winter, then it needs to have some seasonal drama. That's always really important in a garden."

It was for this reason that Jane chose plants with the kind of delicate detail that repays close attention: dainty-flowered apricot *Geum* 'Savanna Sunset' alongside bright purple-pink *Lamium maculatum* 'Beacon Silver', London pride (*Saxifraga x urbium*) with its clouds of pale-pink flowers and the creamy pincushions of *Scabiosa columbaria* subsp. *ochroleuca*. "I was trying to get a subtle shift of colour," Jane explains. "The back of the house is painted pink, so I chose plants with pink or white flowers, then bruised purples and browns for later in the year, which sit within that colour palette and tie in with the tones of the gravel." The delicately ferny-leaved *Acaena microphylla* 'Kupferteppich' covers the ground, along with a colourful clover, *Trifolium repens* 'William' and acid-yellow *Euphorbia cyparissias*. In contrast, *Darmera peltata* rises behind the London pride like clumps of huge green umbrellas, while the large hand-like leaves of *Rodgersia aesculifolia* add another layer of lush foliage – a perfect foil for the flowers.

Above Carefully placed gardening artefacts create a vignette on the bespoke concrete bench. **Right** Complex drifts of cottage-style planting contrast with the clean zigzag lines of the fence. **Below** A small courtyard area is home to John's potted conifer collection.



Fact file

- **Garden design** Jane Brockbank. Tel: 020 7371 9475; janebrockbank.com
- **Architectural design** John Smart Architects. Tel: 020 7633 0055; johnsmartarchitects.co.uk
- **Brick paving** Petersen. Tel: +45 4014 1236; en.petersen-gruppen.dk
- **Gravel** CEDEC footpath gravel from CED Stone. Tel: 01708 867237; cedstone.co.uk
- **Dining table and benches** Another Country. Tel: 020 7486 3251; anothercountry.com
- **Paint** Fence painted in 'Mouse's Back' from Farrow & Ball. Tel: 01202 876141; farrow-ball.com

Then there is the front garden. "This is a tricky spot," says Jane, "because the bedroom looks onto it, which is quite unusual, and you can see right through to the road. We wanted to create a sense of privacy and to screen the cars and the road, so we mounded up the soil and planted multi-stemmed birch. We wanted it to look like a slice of intense woodland."

Again, texture and detail were the drivers: pink cow parsley (*Chaerophyllum hirsutum* 'Roseum') jostles alongside *Luzula nivialis* and lime green *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae*. Ferns, shrubby willows (*Salix hastata*) and *Viburnum opulus* enhance the woodland feel, while slivers of pale-grey paving that cut into the planting provide ample parking for cars.

"One thing was essential to the brief," Jane points out. "Inside the house is a really beautiful mix of quite bucolic materials. John wanted that narrative to be carried through to the gardens. The gardens were to bring you into the house, let you journey through that space, and then out again." Who wouldn't

want to leave the house and explore such a detailed garden, with so much to catch the eye?

Design details

PAVING

Danish firm Petersen supplied the paving used throughout the garden. Rectangular bricks in varying sizes and slightly differing shades of soft grey are laid in an offset pattern, left jagged rather than cut-off square where they meet gravel or planting, which blurs and softens the edges.

FENCING

John's eye-catching zigzag-patterned fence has rusty-brown steel diagonals set into timber uprights. Those uprights, as well as the slatted timber fences on the other boundaries, are painted in 'Mouse's Back' from Farrow & Ball – a shade of greenish-grey that perfectly complements the predominantly green-toned planting. Elsewhere in the garden, the wall and gate that separate the front and back gardens have been enhanced with a decorative cladding of old terracotta-coloured roof tiles. The tiles were reclaimed by John from the house that previously stood on the site.

FRONT GARDEN

A woodland effect was sought in the front garden, with a palette of plants suited to the dappled shade cast by Jane's chosen specimen trees, multi-stemmed silver birch. The trees effectively screen the house from the busy road, and ensure the view from the master bedroom at the front of the house is not just one of parked cars. Rushy white-flowered *Luzula nivea* and spiky-leaved *Iris foetidissima* enjoy these conditions, as does frothy pink cow parsley, enhanced by house walls painted the palest pink.



BACK GARDEN

Groundcover plants – *Acaena*, *Trifolium*, *Lamium* – form a tapestry of colour against the pinkish tones of the gravel, rising to the taller flower spikes of plants such as foxgloves and *Rodgersia* at the back.

FURNITURE

John's large table and benches came from Another Country. This stylish seating looks more like indoor furniture than a garden set, but since it's made from solid oak and brass, it can be kept outdoors. A bespoke concrete bench runs along the right-hand boundary and is home to a display of plants in myriad terracotta pots. "John wanted to have a collection of something and I thought it would be nice to have it raised up on the bench," Jane explains. Below the bench, strips of red LED lighting add another dimension. ■

Above The concrete bench is highlighted by red LEDs, its surface home to potted plants.
Below Silver birch trees screen the parking space from the house, and the house from the street.
Below left Solid oak furniture sits on soft grey bricks that merge with surrounding planting.

