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GARDENS

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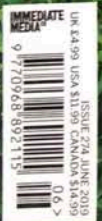
INCLUDING

**Woodland planting
in a small city garden**

**The flower garden
inspired by
William Robinson**

**No Floral
Foam**

**Cut flowers go
eco-conscious**



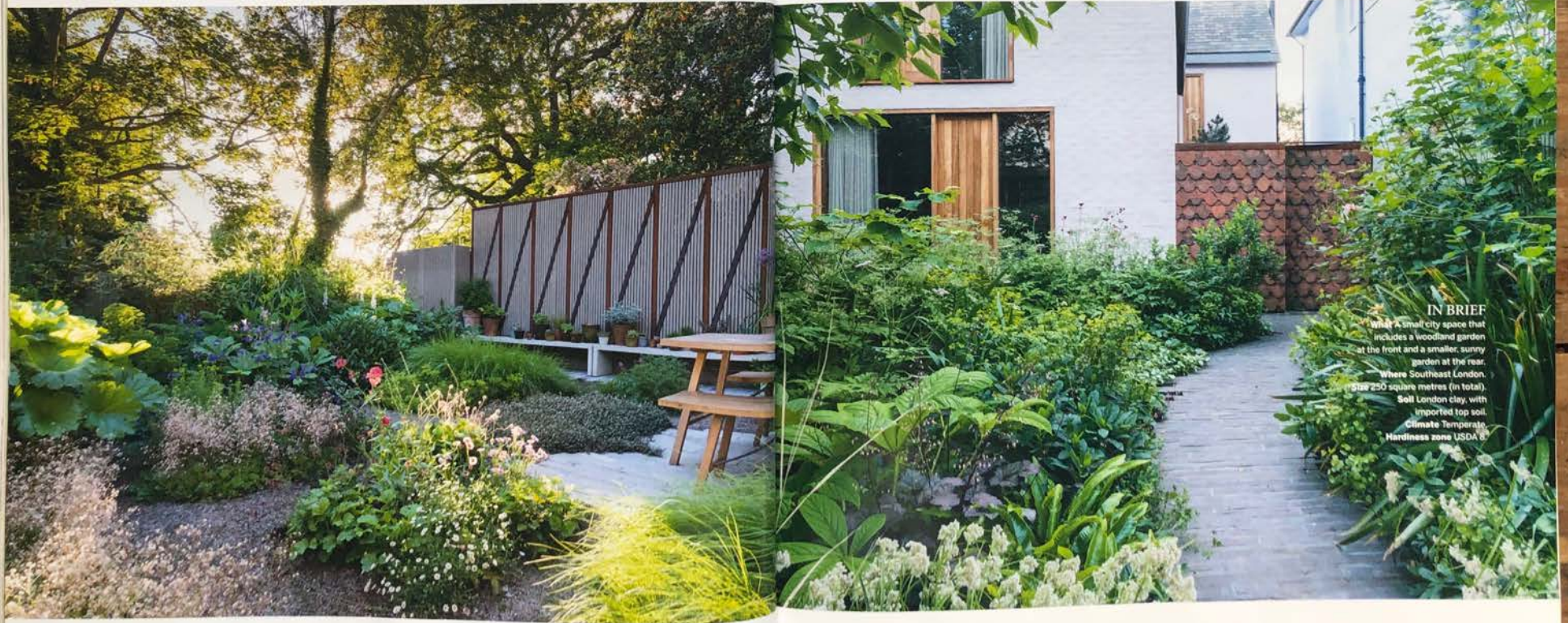
**The most beautiful
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for constant colour**

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For his own small garden in southeast London, architect John Smart brought in garden designer Jane Brockbank to create a richly planted woodland scheme that would complement his architectural ideas and help connect his newly rebuilt home with neighbouring woodland

Small wonder

WORDS KENDRA WILSON PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD BLOOM



Below left At the rear of the house strong structural plants with bold leaf shapes contrast with soft flowering plants. Umbrellas of *Darmera peltata* loom over dainty clouds of *Saxifraga x urbium*, while *Rodgersia aesculifolia* provides a foil to the intense purple of *Aquilegia vulgaris* var. *stellata* 'Blue Barlow'

Below right At the front of the house a brick path leads down an incline through woodland planting that includes *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding', and *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robore*. The discreet entry is hidden behind a panel of traditional Kent tiles, salvaged from the original coach house that stood on this site.

IN BRIEF

What A small city space that includes a woodland garden at the front and a smaller, sunnier garden at the rear.

Where Southeast London.

Size 250 square metres (in total).

Soil London clay, with imported top soil.

Climate Temperate.

Hardiness zone USDA 8.

Architects make good landscape designers; it stands to reason. With no interruption of thought from inside to out, there is a logical flow of quality materials. But what to plant in the areas between the well-considered paving, the whole scene framed by large windows? For his own family home in southeast London, John Smart of Craftworks architects decided not to go it alone, sensibly calling in the services of garden designer Jane Brockbank.

"I like working with architects, particularly on their own gardens," says Jane. "They do things that I wouldn't think of doing." It works both ways. John was keen to have a lawn but over time, Jane has shown him that the planting could be just as rigorous as the building. "There are a few architects I work with who value the outside space as much as the inside, and they're the most fun."

The house is tucked away on a wooded hillside in Sydenham, where London begins to feel like Kent. A square-shaped garden

behind the house is smaller than the one in front, which can take a parked car. Three *Betula albosinensis*, faintly pink and peeling, build up privacy from the street while distracting from vehicles. "The concept was for this to be a slice of woodland floor, albeit with the volume turned up," explains Jane. It suits the area and it suits the soil, which is heavy clay beneath 20-50cm of imported top soil.

Narrow pavers make incursions into knee-high planting, indicating where to park and how to get to the house. The entry is disguised behind a solid gate of clay tiles, the kind found on buildings all over Kent and Sussex. They are from the coach house that originally stood on this site, and combined with paving from Denmark (John's wife Siri is Danish), the effect is bucolic-cosmopolitan. Another key element here: the building is pale pink.

As a backdrop, it is warm and flattering, with pink and white a leitmotif in this supercharged woodland. In early summer, lilac-pink cow parsley *Chaerophyllum hirsutum* 'Roseum' is followed by magenta thistles of *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum', buoyed by ▶

Clever parking

Ideas for combining parking and planting

Woodland planting is more forgiving for disguising a car-parking area than an expensive screen of topiary. Front gardens can often benefit from a lighter touch and the semi-shaded conditions created by the trio of airy *Betula albosinensis* in this garden is ideal for informal planting below.

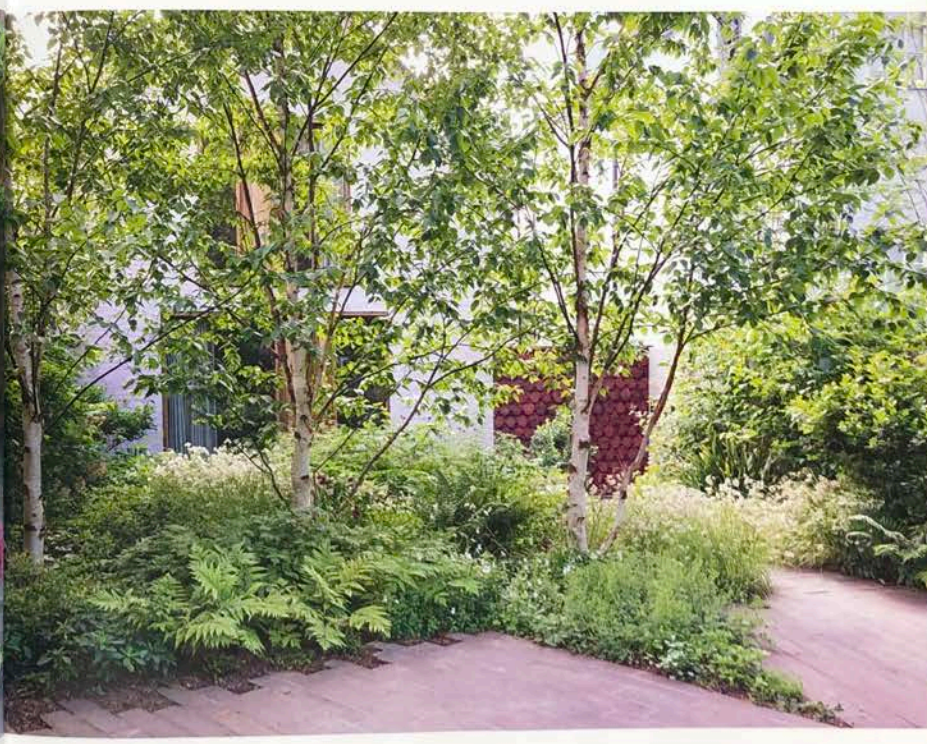
Plant textures become more prominent against hard paving, particularly when the edging is unevenly laid, as it is here. Since plants don't always co-operate in covering the ground perfectly, especially when there is foot traffic, bare patches need to be addressed. Jane uses a mulch of dark, mineralised straw to prevent tricky areas from looking too messy.

Select plants that will keep their shape in winter. The dappled meadow of this front garden is bolstered by a selection of evergreen ferns including *Polystichum setiferum* Divisilobum Group 'Proliferum'. Closer to the edges, by the paving, evergreen groundcover *Pachysandra terminalis* is joined by hardy *Alchemilla erythropoda* and the pure-white, horned pansy *Viola cornuta* Alba Group.

Planting isn't the only way to hide cars from the sight lines of the house. In this garden Jane spaded and raked new topsoil to different heights, creating undulating landforms close to the front windows. These not only help to block out parked cars but create a feature in their own right.

Below left Close to house, magenta flowerheads of *Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum' punctuate a froth of *Luzula nivea*, backed by seedheads of *Chaerophyllum hirsutum*. Foliage comes to the fore at the planting edges, with the fern *Atthium filix-femina* 'Plumosum Cristatum' spilling on to the paving.

Below right Between the house and the parking area, three *Betula albosinensis* provide dappled shade for meadow planting and ferns. These include *Polystichum setiferum* Divisilobum Group 'Proliferum' and *Dryopteris filix-mas*, which grow to a considerable height and help to soften the view of cars and the street.



▷ snowy *Luzula nivea*. Fresh green is the main foil, with evergreens only making up a quarter of both gardens. Along the boundary, several *Viburnum opulus* 'Roseum' alternate with David Austin's soft pink *Rosa* 'The Alexandra Rose' (= 'Ausday'), an upmarket dog rose in an edited native hedge.

Down an incline, on the other side of the house, the garden tells a different story. "It's primarily about texture," says Jane. "Colour is a bonus, and it's quite muted." There are further variations on pink, including *Erigeron* 'Dinity' and clouds of pale *Saxifraga x urbium* flowers hovering on red stems. Big leaves of *Dierisya peltata* and *Rodgersia aesculifolia* put a lid on this daintiness, with taller, structural plants, such as *Euphorbia melifera*, *Arbutus unedo* and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder' hitting the boundary at the back. Closer to the house, *Sesleria autumnalis* is spread out on the ground like a couple of shaggy rugs. "It's all about the shifts," says Jane.

Hidden beneath the planting, wide ovals of edging mark out the beds. These are intersected by bound path gravel, compacted

over time for a firm surface. It's ideal for self-seeding plants, such as scabious, fleabane and wild strawberry. "We intentionally allow a bit of that," says Jane. "We've talked about what is allowed and what isn't." And weeding? "Oh yeah, weeds love it." Fortunately for Jane's clients, an angel and his name, Jonathan Gildersleeves, seems to confirm this.

Bespoke concrete benches are a way of allowing more plants into the garden. Raised above the carefully selected community in the ground, John's collection of mainly green plants creates a tension with the strong lines of hard landscaping, not least the slatted larch fence with its diagonals of Corten steel. This pale conveyor belt of little pots leads the eye toward a quieter, lower perimeter, the wooded hill dropping away below. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Jane's work at janebrockbank.com

Below left Jane talked John out of a lawn for the back garden, but she has included two clumps of the grass *Sesleria autumnalis* among other, low-growing plants, such as *Acaena microphylla* 'Kupferleppich' close to the dining area. Beyond a tightly planted mix of taller shrubs and grasses largely cover the low larch fence helping to blend the garden with the woodland beyond.

Below right Owner John Smart designed the slatted, larch fence, reinforced with Corten steel. He also commissioned the concrete benches to provide more opportunities to display plants in pots. Neon strip lighting beneath the benches bathes the evening garden in a pink glow.

