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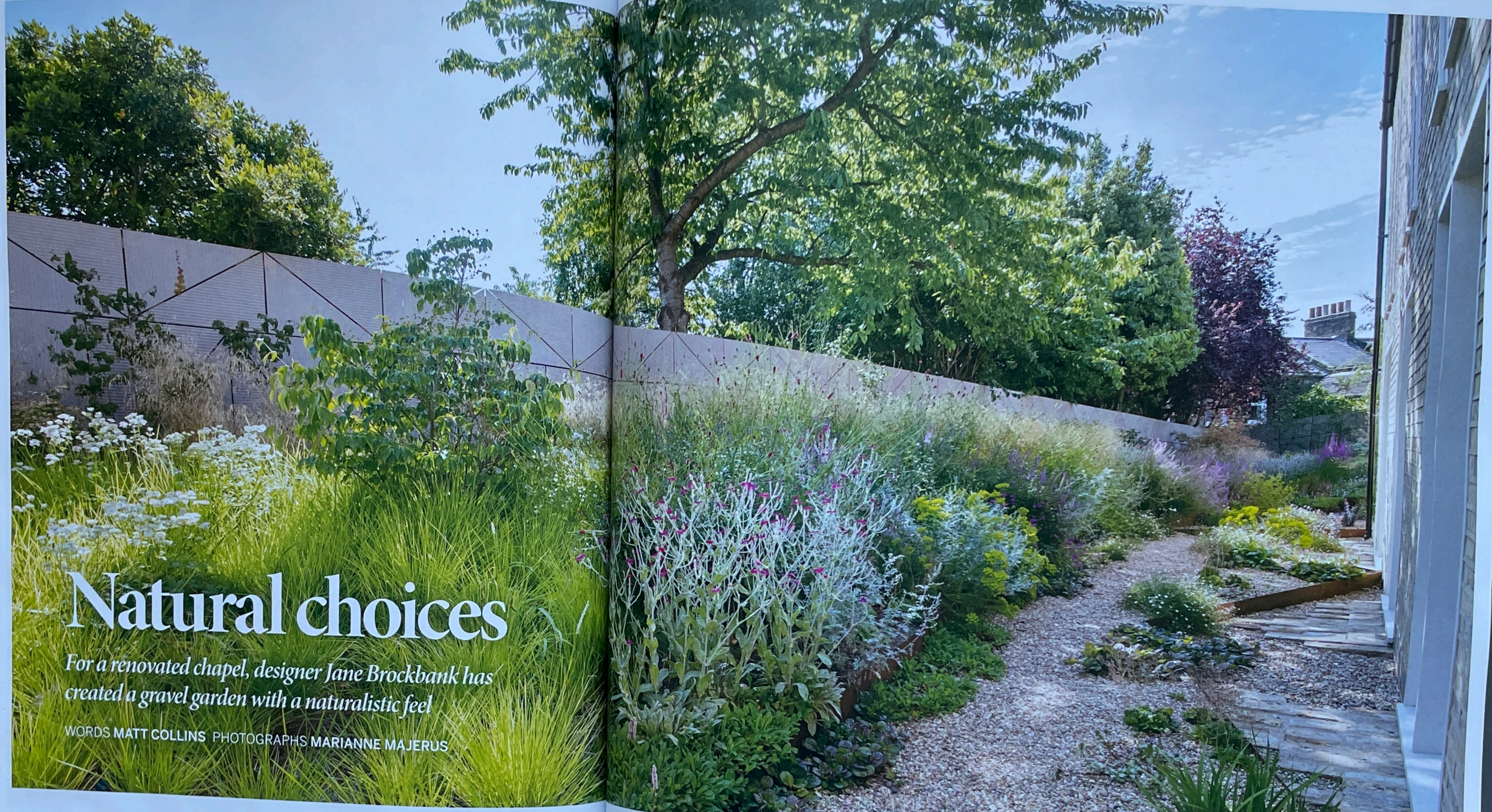
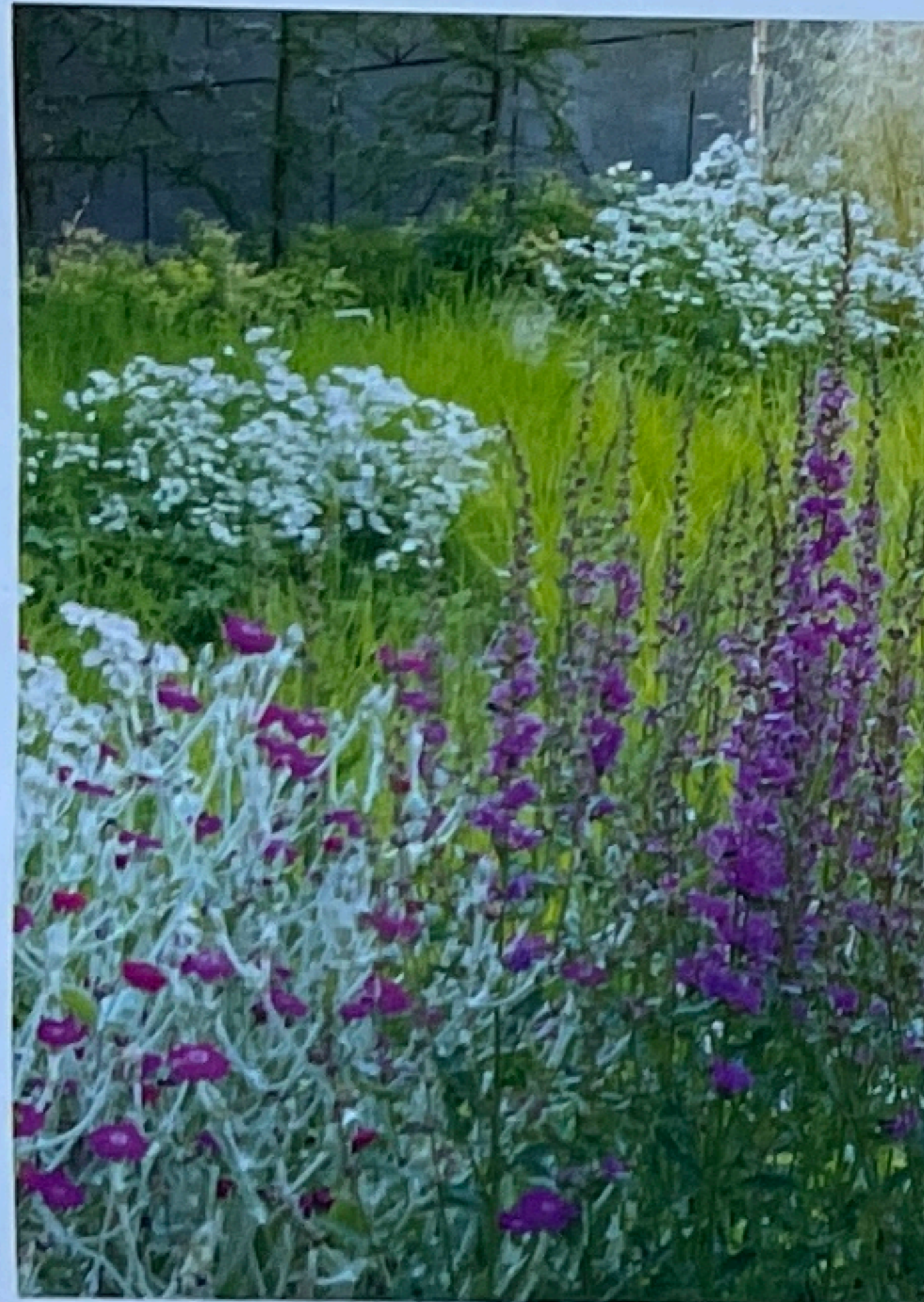
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Beautiful, sustainable design on the East Coast



Natural choices

For a renovated chapel, designer Jane Brockbank has created a gravel garden with a naturalistic feel

WORDS MATT COLLINS PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

KEY ELEMENTS

What City garden.

Where South London.

Soil London clay.

Size 35m x 13m.

Aspect Southeast facing.

Special features Naturalistic planting in a zonal configuration with mixed border, wildflower lawn and gravel planting.

Designed by Jane Brockbank Gardens (janebrockbank.com).

Down an unlikely side alley in south London lies a most enviable refuge: a fusion of tranquil informality and high concept rarely exhibited in city gardens. Lucid *Lychnis coronaria* and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' tumble over Corten steel, while a lawn-cum-meadow, rich with bedstraw and buttercup, flows from a boundary of light-filtering trees and climbing shrubs. This serene landscape was conceived by garden designer Jane Brockbank, working with Craftworks (formerly John Smart Architects) to unite house and garden through angular patterns, bespoke vistas and, despite its limited size, contrasting zones.

With the house – a once-derelict, unconsecrated chapel – progressively remodelled to include an open-plan living space, modern Gothic ceiling and eccentric nods to its ecclesiastical history, Jane had the opportunity to create a bold garden with textures, frame windows. "I had fun," says Jane. "The high-faceted architecture forced me to work in a different way, dividing the planting into quite clear, different sections."

These sections are composed of tessellated triangular shapes that mirror the chapel's design; some are intensely planted for colour while others remain neutral. The latter, for example, comprise a simple mix of white astrantias and moor grass (*Sesleria autumnalis*); complementary plants that move with the breeze. Other zones include an airy bank of *Stipa gigantea*; tall Antarctic beech (*Nothofagus antarctica*) and Swedish birch (*Betula pendula* 'Laciniata') texturally underplanted with

Euphorbia amygdaloides var. *robbiae* and *Epimedium x rubrum*, and a gravel section studded with spreading perennials such as *Ajuga reptans*, *Lamium maculatum* 'Beacon Silver' and pink sea thrift. The centrepiece – if there is such a thing in a garden of triangles – is a formal seating terrace surrounded by a great swathe of jubilant repeat planting: tall sanguisorbas, bright *Lythrum virgatum* 'Rosy Gem' and the acid-green umbellifer *Zizia aurea*. Nestled towards the back are establishing feature shrubs of guelder rose, *Euonymus alatus* and *Philadelphus* 'Belle Étoile', all floating in a sea of

In the zone

Gardens divided by formal hedges, walls or water, into what are generally called garden rooms, offer the chance to create a series of distinctive and unrelated planting styles. Zones can be a little more tricky to pull off, as the eye travels from one to the other unobstructed. "In a garden, you don't want to have completely contrasting spaces in a long line," explains Jane. "A garden wants to flow, so the zones have to speak the same language while shifting in colour and texture." To achieve this Jane suggests selecting plants that have a naturalistic feel, such as loosestrife, euphorbias and grasses. "There's nothing very hybridised in this garden," she says. Repetition is also a good way to bring cohesion to a larger space. Jane has bookended this garden with neutral areas of *Astrantia major* 'Large White' and dense *Sesleria autumnalis* grass. Once a framework is in place elements can move around. "It's about keeping areas clearly defined but also flowing together," says Jane. "Avoiding things becoming too rigid." As this garden illustrates so well, even the most contemporary of concept designs can allow nature to blur the edges.

Above

Lush and exuberant textural planting, featuring tall, herbaceous *Sanguisorba officinalis* 'Red Thunder' and the silvery leaved *Lychnis coronaria*, faces the converted chapel across a gravel zone planted with robust and spreading *Persicaria affinis* 'Darjeeling Red'. Near the fence a *Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis* 'China Girl' shrub sits among the grass *Sesleria autumnalis* dotted with clumps of *Astrantia major* 'Large White'.

Facing page

Top Textured cement board fence panels, in a triangular shape that echoes the Chapel's extraordinary ecclesiastical roof, are softened by frothy grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier'.

Below Tall spikes of purple loosestrife, *Lythrum virgatum* 'Rosy Gem' are a colour link to *Lychnis coronaria*, while behind, clumps of *Astrantia major* 'Large White' float in sea of the grass *Sesleria autumnalis*.



Plants don't stay in neat lines, they spill over and migrate, but I like that, you want to feel joy when you walk in it



This page

Top left Yellow *Euphorbia seguieriana* stands out against shimmering *Artemisia alba* 'Canescens' in front of *Sanguisorba officinalis* 'Red Thunder' studding *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier'.

Top right Corten steel edging defines the different zones, here separating lush planting from a gravel zone dotted with low-growing *Ajuga reptans* 'Catlin's Giant' and *Persicaria affinis* 'Darjeeling Red'.

Right Triangular sheets of Corten steel create a central seating zone enclosed by a great swathe of jubilant planting, from tall, pink *Lythrum virgatum* 'Rosy Gem' to low-growing *Persicaria affinis* 'Darjeeling Red', which spills over the edging, bringing an informality to the garden's structure.

Facing page

An informal pathway weaves through gravel planting of durable low-growing plants including *Lamium maculatum* 'Beacon Silver', *Erigeron karvinskianus* and *Libertia grandiflora*.

▷ *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldschleier' that – when summer draws to a close – put on a spectacular autumnal show.

The intention behind the zones was to offer differing perspectives from the property, from delicate planting viewed close-up through floor-length windows to tall boundary trees for privacy. "I suspect that things will become less rigid as time goes on," says Jane. "I always knew that the shapes would eventually blur – plants don't stay in neat lines, they spill-over and migrate. But I quite like that; it's a garden after all: you want to feel joy when you walk in it." Indeed the planting feels naturalistic, particularly the gravel species, which appear almost self-seeded. This informality is mirrored by the meadow opposite, one of mix as we wanted a low, rather than typical meadow, height." In spring, crocus and narcissus bulbs add early seasonal colour, before the wildflowers from the seed mix, such as *Prunella vulgaris* (selfheal) and *Lotus corniculatus* (bird's foot trefoil), begin to flower in early summer. "These seed mixes are a practical thing people can do with their lawns," adds Jane. "They're so much better for insects, and they're also less work."

Considering the garden was only created three years ago, it is astonishing how well the planting is taking possession of its hard-edged boundaries. "I've been surprised manoeuvre. "Now we've got a handle on what grows well here we can experiment and make changes," says Jane. "That's the real fun of gardens." □

