



Changing Aspirations

Designer Peter Reader transformed a family garden into a sophisticated space for outdoor entertaining

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What makes a garden a 'grown-up garden'? Perhaps it is the inclusion of veteran plants reaching the height of maturity, or an aged tree looming over the landscape. For Tom Bannatyne, a 'grown-up' garden meant one that no longer served as a place for child's play. With their children grown up, and no longer using it to play football or indulge in some trampolining, Tom and his wife, Rebecca, decided it was time for their walled garden in north London to be redesigned.

So a grown-up garden for outdoor entertaining is what designer Peter Reader (above) was asked to create. Tom kept seeing Peter's car – advertising his design service – in the area, discovering that they were almost neighbours. That close proximity allowed for an easy working relationship, with Peter able to visit the garden regularly to assess the site in the flesh and draw up plans. "Tom and Rebecca were very open to ideas," says Peter. "There were fruit trees in the garden, which they were keen to keep and they wanted a very naturalistic garden."

With a perimeter of slightly overgrown, sun-starved shrubbery leaning towards the centre of the garden, Peter saw exposing the garden's boundary as the key to getting the most from the site.



“The garden felt dark and enclosed. It seemed much smaller than it actually was,” explains Peter. But he was in no doubt that the red-brick walls that surround the garden on three sides were an attractive feature in the making. By clearing the overgrown planting that was obscuring the walls, the garden found instant character and a strong boundary that framed the entire area and married it to the exterior of the house.

“We wanted a garden that was relaxed without too much structure or formality,” says Tom. Peter’s design strikes a delicate balance between formality and informality, creating soft, informal areas of planting inside a formal layout of straight lines, a trick beloved of the Edwardian Arts and Crafts design pair Edward Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.

“There are some Arts and Crafts principles behind the garden. The middle of the garden has a formal layout with naturalistic planting and aquatic plants, with an orchard towards the bottom of the garden, after formality close to the house. It is an Arts and Crafts design but on a small scale,” says Peter.

There are strong lines in the lawn and paving, to echo the glass-fronted rooms that adjoin the garden and provide views of it from inside. Cleverly tying together the inside and outside, Peter’s layout is loosely a garden of three areas, each one designed to be viewed from a different location within the house.

The first area is viewed from the glass-fronted kitchen. Previously a muddy corner where a lawn struggled to grow in waterlogged conditions, a hard surface was much more suitable, so Peter chose a self-binding gravel surface edged with cobblestones. Two *Amelanchier lamarckii* trees, chosen for their ability to look good almost all year, soften the area.

The waterlogging was a tell-tale sign of a garden on London clay. Peter says it was a ‘dead’ soil that needed better fertility and drainage before planting. Manure and horticultural grit were mixed into the existing soil, with the exception of the wildflower



Above left Airy perennials mixed with silvery *Artemisia* and *Alchemilla* soften the formality of the design.

Above The formal pond is a contemporary take on classic Arts and Crafts style.

Right Sleeper-edged raised beds solve the problem of planting in the garden’s waterlogged corner.



areas, which were kept free of extra nutrients to encourage flowering.

The second area is overlooked from the living room, with a formal pond centrepiece, complete with rill, stepping stones and flower beds on either side. These beds are very softly planted with *Verbena bonariensis*, *Erigeron karvinskianus*, Japanese anemones and *Alchemilla mollis*, interspersed with evergreen shrubs. Surrounding turf contrasts with the smooth stone paving.

The third area is the wildest, where Peter found a home for the fruit trees and underplanted them with a wildflower meadow and spring bulbs. Wildflower turf was used to create the meadow, with an area of ‘normal’ turf laid in the middle to allow for a bench among the trees.

With the exception of the climbers, Peter planted the garden to fill the space immediately. Tom explains: “It was planted to evolve through the seasons rather than over a long period of time, and it is good to be able to appreciate the changing seasons from inside the house. Or to come back from holiday and see that the garden has changed.”



Right The garden’s layout was designed to provide distinct views from the house.

Below Fruit trees were in the brief, and were found a home in the garden’s informal orchard and meadow area.

FACT FILE

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Design Details

Paving

Peter created raised areas in the garden by building block walls. The decision to finish them on both the top and sides with smooth paving is perfectly in keeping with the formal underlying structure of the garden, and their smooth, unobtrusive edges allow the rugged red-brick perimeter walls to stand out as the garden's most prominent feature.

Lawn

It may seem a bit old-fashioned to include a lawn in an urban back garden that borders a modern glass-fronted living area but by sculpting it into formal shapes it becomes a chic garden feature. Peter also points out that a lawn is a key, evergreen component in a garden that looks good all year round, an important consideration when the whole garden can be viewed from the interior of the house.

Climbers

The trellis has been planted with a mix of ivies, climbing hydrangeas for the shady areas, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Clematis* 'The President'. The trellis was chosen to fit in with and echo the shapes of the design during the time it takes for the climbers to cover them. Once the climbers have covered the trellis, the plan is to trim them into rectangles to stay consistent with the design.

Sundial

The sundial from David Harber was in the garden before the redesign but didn't have a purpose. Now it draws the eye across the rectangular stepping stones placed across the width of the water. Previously randomly positioned, this sundial and another statue Tom and Rebecca already owned now occupy strategic positions, and serve as an integral part of Peter's design.

Trees

Multi-stemmed *Amelanchier lamarckii* grows in a rectangular patch of self-binding gravel. Blackbirds love the berries at the end of summer and the tree has good autumn foliage colour as well as clouds of snowy blossom in spring: it supplies three hits of interest throughout the year. This area close to the southern end of the garden was prone to waterlogging and its original covering of grass grew poorly in the conditions. "It was very muddy and I wanted the area to be somewhere that people could easily walk out to," says Peter. "There would be no way to hide grass that was growing poorly in this design," he adds.

Cobble pavers

Thin, neat edges made from cobbled pavers are used in an understated way. They bring extra detail to the edge of planting beds and hard surfaces and frame the form and foliage of plants at the extremities of the beds and borders.

Signs

A vintage London Underground sign was bought at a Transport for London auction before Peter redesigned the garden. By fixing it to one of the brick walls it looks like it belongs. Tom remembers that it cost him almost as much to transport the sign home as it did to buy it. n



Left A vintage London Underground sign adds quirky detail to one of the perimeter walls.

Above A classic garden element, a sundial draws the eye and contributes to the air of formality.

Below Pale stone paths contrast with red-brick walls and neatly mown areas of lawn.

