



Uniting space for united living

A small private London courtyard proves that almost any outdoor area has the potential to be transformed

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Photography: GAP / Marcus Harpur



Brick walls, steel beams and a formal structure (left) add to an industrial feel. Lively spots of colour are injected by pelargoniums in cast-iron drainpipe hoppers (below).



Tucked down a side street, not far from busy Harrow Road in northwest London, many a passer-by will probably be intrigued by a pair of smartly revamped industrial gates and what may lie beyond them. The answer is a playful and contemporary yet restful private garden – a cool retreat created in a space that was first converted from a factory in 2005. Five years ago, the current owners asked interior designers Maddux Creative to make the large, open-plan interior space more suitable for family living, Adolfo Harrison was brought in to work with them to design the 338sq m (404sq yd) L-shaped courtyard garden.

Drawing inspiration from French courtyards and Japanese design, he echoed the eclectic mix of styles and textures used inside the house: silk curtains hanging next to concrete floors and walls, vintage gym equipment and a plaster bust adorning the dining area. Adolfo enjoyed working with the family on this project as they were so receptive, letting him throw all sorts of ideas at them and allowing him to be really creative with the design.

The effect achieved in this courtyard could be re-created on a smaller budget, perhaps by using climbers along wires or wooden posts to create a similar sense of height and enclosure.

Creating a fun and practical outdoor space

Reiterating the client's desire for intimate spaces within the house, and with more than a nod to the building's industrial past, Adolfo installed a number of I-beams (structural steel beams) over the garden to add a feel of permanence and to create a real sense of flow, bringing together what was previously the driveway and courtyard into a unified space for

adults and children to enjoy. Evergreen climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides* AGM was planted to creep over and soften these structures.

Original features, such as an exterior concrete staircase and handsome dark brick paving, already produced a magical atmosphere within the garden; Adolfo wanted to retain this feeling, while also making the garden fun, practical, and lush with greenery. Old swings hang on chunky chains above an area of paving partly covered with AstroTurf, »

London courtyard transformed

Size: 338sq m (404sq yd).

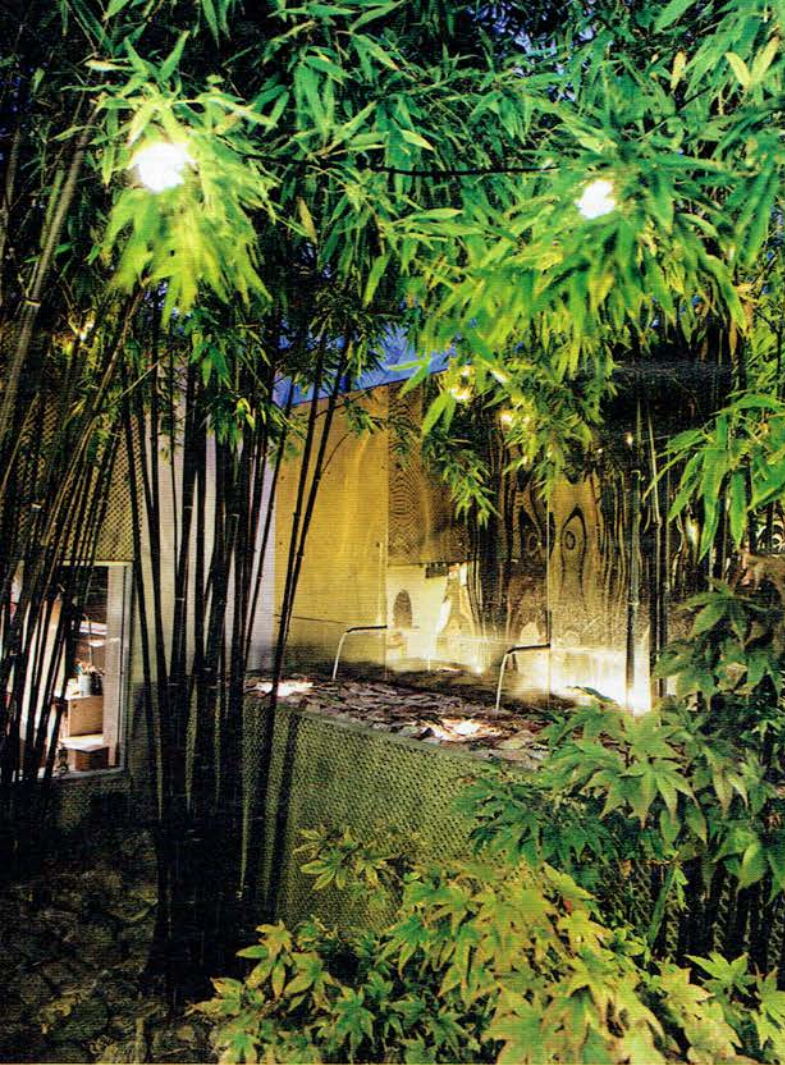
Age of garden: 5 years.

Key plants: a large fig and grapevine in pots create canopy, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus' and bamboo *Phyllostachys nigra* are used for screening. The star climber is *Trachelospermum jasminoides*.

Design features: AstroTurf and swings for children's play space; steel beams to add a cohesive feel; water feature for focal point; lighting to transform the garden after dark.

Not open to the public.





The water feature's mirrored backing (left) bounces warm light around the outdoor area after dark. As the lighting indoors and out match (above), the spaces feel connected.

giving the owners' children a generous play area. More chances to add planting have been created with the addition of vintage planters, including a milk churn, metal watering cans and ceramic and metal pots, lovingly sourced from reclamation yards.

Key plants for a city garden

In one corner, the concrete staircase is clothed with more *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, chosen in part for the heady summer scent of its flowers, redolent of more exotic climes. Drawing your eyes upwards, a balcony is playfully peppered on one side with clipped topiary; on the other a waving strip of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus' adds a sense of privacy and enclosure to both balcony and courtyard below. Other walls are draped with stately Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*), espaliered apple trees and bamboo *Phyllostachys aurea* AGM. There's plenty of interesting seating in the garden, from a glamorous hanging Perspex ball to benches that double up as storage. A large fig and an old

gnarly grapevine, both planted in large pots, add a glorious canopy to the courtyard. To sit in its dappled light on a hot summer's day gives the feeling of being in the south of France, not London.

One of Adolfo's favourite areas is a grove of *Phyllostachys nigra* AGM. The tinkling from a water feature close by, created in a concrete planter filled with scallop shells, disguises noise from the nearby road. A bronze Perspex mirror wall backs the feature, bouncing back soft light into the garden, and providing a rich backdrop for the lofty bamboo.

At night the garden is transformed by strings of lights among the climbers and bamboo, Turkish lamps project soft patterns, and uplighting from the water feature provides a warm glow to match lighting within the house, melding inside and out into a most hospitable space.

As the climbers gradually wind their way upwards and drape over their supports, the design is ageing well, adding a lush layer to the already rich history of this former factory. ○

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