



Perfect urban retreat: a corten steel rill, left, brings birds for a dip or a drink into the garden created by London-based designer Adolfo Harrison
Right: clever lighting sets the mood of this magical outdoor room by night

Photographs:
Mischa Haller



It's our best room, naturally

Conjuring the feel of a Barcelona courtyard, this Shepherd's Bush garden is timeless and organic

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A NEW naturalism is creeping into the work of London's top garden designers, one that combines sustainability with sharp landscaping. A courtyard garden which was a double winner at the recent Society of Garden Designers Awards for its creator, London-based **Adolfo Harrison**, has the look in spades.

When Carla Pont and her partner Will Slater first moved into their Shepherd's Bush property it was derelict. "Squatters and pigeons were its previous inhabitants," remembers Carla. "The garden was pretty much a dumping ground that only the foxes were fond of." The 16ftx50ft space was surrounded by buildings and enclosed by a tall brick wall which meant some areas were in full sun, others in deepest shade.

But Pont had an idea: "I grew up in Barcelona and always thought it was magical to find hidden courtyards at the centre of the buildings. I wanted to recreate something in that vein, acknowledging that we were still in an urban environment but a green space in which you could escape. Adolfo had an affinity with Barcelona and knew what I was talking about."

Rather than ripping everything out, Harrison had a good look at what was already there. "In the Barcelona courtyards plants take over structures, giving dappled light and strong shadows," he says. The old brick wall was full of character, so he left it unrestored and planted it with climbing hydrangea, star jasmine and a gnarly, mature wisteria so that it looked as though it had been there for years. "In Spain, the best room in the house is outside," he says.

Knowing Pont and Slater entertain a lot, Harrison added a large Red Western Cedar

pergola over the suntrap dining area, where star jasmine provides welcome shade and scent above a Big Green Egg barbecue and large concrete table.

It's not all rampant greenery. Harrison created a strong grid layout with a Red Western Cedar boardwalk and pale Bateig limestone paving. But natural elements reappear throughout. A corten steel rill against the wall brings a lived-in rustiness and is a magnet for visiting birds. Even the lighting has an organic feel, in the shape of a mesmeric disc which radiates a halo of rays on to the back wall above two Tio Easy Chairs.

The plants don't look chosen so much as discovered already growing. "I wanted to make it look as though they had willingly seeded themselves," says Harrison. "That's why we sank the planting, to give the illusion that the layout dropped on top of it." Three multistem Amelanchier laevis Ballerina trees look like an enchanted woodland, especially uplit at night. Under them, a natural-looking mosaic of plants needs little maintenance. Evergreen sweet box is left unclipped. Mind your own business smotherers weeds around the hart's tongue ferns.

Red flowered Persicaria affinis Superba and deep blue Aconitum Bressingham Spire are propped up by purple salvia nemorosa Caradonna and silvery Russian sage. The overall effect is of a landscape that has always been there. "Sometimes it's hard to believe you are in the middle of Shepherd's Bush," says Pont. "Adolfo took the kernel of an idea and turned it into a magical space."

GET THE LOOK

- To commission Adolfo Harrison: visit adolfoharrison.com
- Chairs: Tio Outdoor Easy Chairs, £348 each from twentytwentyone.com
- Wall light: Vibia Meridiano 4720, matted off-white, £234.89 from dmlights.co.uk
- Plants: Majestic Trees (majestictrees.co.uk); Tendercare Plant Nursery (tendercare.co.uk) and Orchard Dene Nurseries (orcharddene.co.uk)

ADOLFO'S 'NEW NATURAL' GARDEN TIPS

- Go to see designer Dan Pearson's public planting by the canal in King's Cross for a masterclass in how to layer plants in a natural way.
- Use climbers to create atmosphere; buy mature specimens of wisteria and grapevines to get that gnarly quality.
- Plant graceful multistem trees such as amelanchier, crab apples, acer, cornus or prunus.
- Create a lived-in quality by using hard landscaping materials that age well, such as corten steel, old brick and Red Western Cedar timber.



Grid layout: view from the kitchen-diner out to pale limestone paving, the Red Western Cedar pergola and planting chosen to look well established