



Small world

Sam Bromfield and Carolyn Springett have used organic shapes and graceful planting to define their city garden

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Since moving into their Victorian terraced house in north London ten years ago, Sam Bromfield and Carolyn Springett have reworked their garden several times, but have always been rather unsatisfied with the results.

Their challenge was one faced by many city dwellers: the garden is fairly small (20m by 5.5m) and overlooked on all sides, which

means there is very little good light. So, while the couple struggled to find a solution for the plot, they concentrated on creating a modern interior for their house. In the course of seeking out decorative items, they could not resist buying some wonderful copper pieces, including a striking water feature by Stephen Myburgh and, in doing so, realised they had

A copper Lily swing seat, designed by Stephen Myburgh (01428 741768, myburghdesigns.com), makes a stunning focal point and a quiet place to bask in the sun at the end of the garden.



TOP LEFT An old metal pitcher is set amid soft stems of *Stipa tenuissima* to create a romantic tableau.

MIDDLE LEFT Carolyn and Sam in their Lily swing seat, surrounded by relaxed green planting and splashes of pink from *Clematis* 'Polish Spirit'.

MIDDLE RIGHT A rectangular copper water feature by Stephen Myburgh.

LEFT This vintage ship's lantern sits among spiky *Scarcococca hookeriana* (Christmas box), white-flowered *Cotoneaster salicifolius* 'Avonbank' and *Digitalis purpurea* 'Alba' (foxgloves) at the base of the pergola.



The garden consists of three areas, all paved with black river slate and laid asymmetrically to make the space feel larger.

inadvertently found a theme that might work in the garden. Determined to rework the space once and for all, they contacted designer Jilayne Rickards.

"When Jilayne first came here, she just sat completely still outside for long periods of time," remembers Sam. "I wondered what on earth she was doing." As the designer later explained, she was in fact absorbing the surroundings, looking at the accessories that Carolyn and Sam had acquired, and developing a plan for a garden that would be contemporary, unusual, dynamic and based

on contrasts of colour and materials.

Today, what strikes you as you enter the garden is its tranquillity. A floor of cool, dark slate surrounded by mulch-covered borders, walls of green acrylic and fluttering foliage evokes a sense of being in a calm, stylised jungle clearing. The effect is strengthened by the borrowed landscape of tall, mature trees in the park beyond the garden wall.

The rust-toned metal pieces were Jilayne's cue to design four copper-framed acrylic screens and to select the feathery purple *Acer palmatum* 'Burgundy Lace'. The screens have



At night the soft glow of the under-lit screens highlights the feathery foliage of *Acer palmatum* 'Burgundy Lace'.

been cleverly arranged so that all four are never visible simultaneously, wherever you stand, creating an air of mystery and helping to divide the space, which makes it feel larger. There are effectively three sections: a dining area with a pergola near the house; a central space with a shed, barbecue and spot for Sam to practise martial arts; and a suntrap, dominated by a romantic swing chair.

The garden now feels like the extra "room" that Sam and Carolyn had been trying to create since they moved in. Attention has been paid to carrying the interior details

outside: the white grout lines of the kitchen floor, for instance, extend out and along the riven black slate.

The overall effect is continuity, enhanced by the repetition of the acers and screens, each underplanted with ferns. Other planting themes have been reproduced, too: evergreen *Sarcococca hookeriana*, for example, appears in each section, as do purple foxgloves.

The contrast of the white and black paving is echoed in the colour scheme of the planting. White and purple wisterias scramble up copper supports at each side of the pergola;

white *Trachelospermum jasminoides* is trained up the purple shed, and white osmanthus is contrasted with purple-stemmed angelica. The planting becomes looser towards the end, softening from containers of clipped box on the terrace to drifts of grasses, foxgloves and ragged astrantias by the swing chair.

As striking at night, when the screens are lit from below, as it is by day, this stunning garden was, not surprisingly, a finalist in the BALI National Landscape awards in 2010. It may have been a ten-year wait, but Sam and Carolyn's dream is now a reality. ■

Garden guide

ORIENTATION North-east.

SOIL TYPE London clay.

SPECIAL FEATURES Four screens, each set behind an *Acer palmatum* 'Burgundy Lace'; pergola; water feature.

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