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IN BRIEF

What Small, new-build, residential garden with high boundaries.

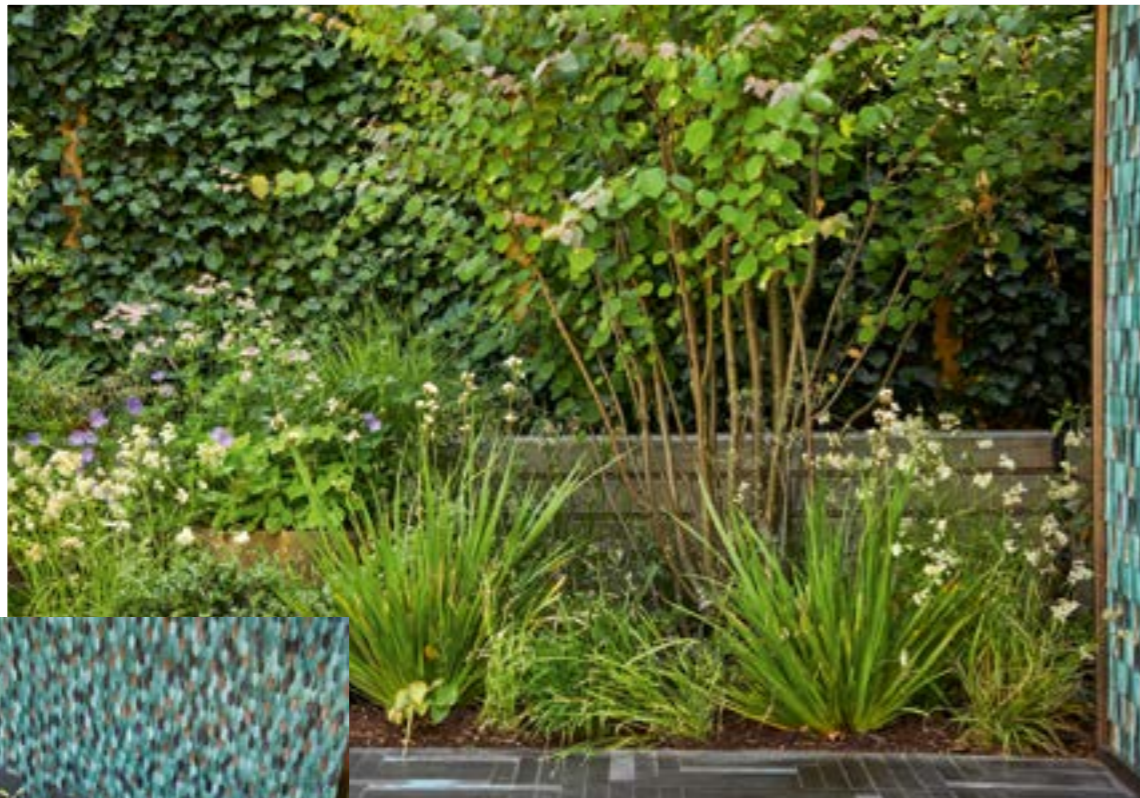
Where South London.

Size Roughly 8m x 15m.

Soil A concrete pad 20cm under the existing lawn was dug out and backfilled with new topsoil.

Climate Temperate, east-facing garden.

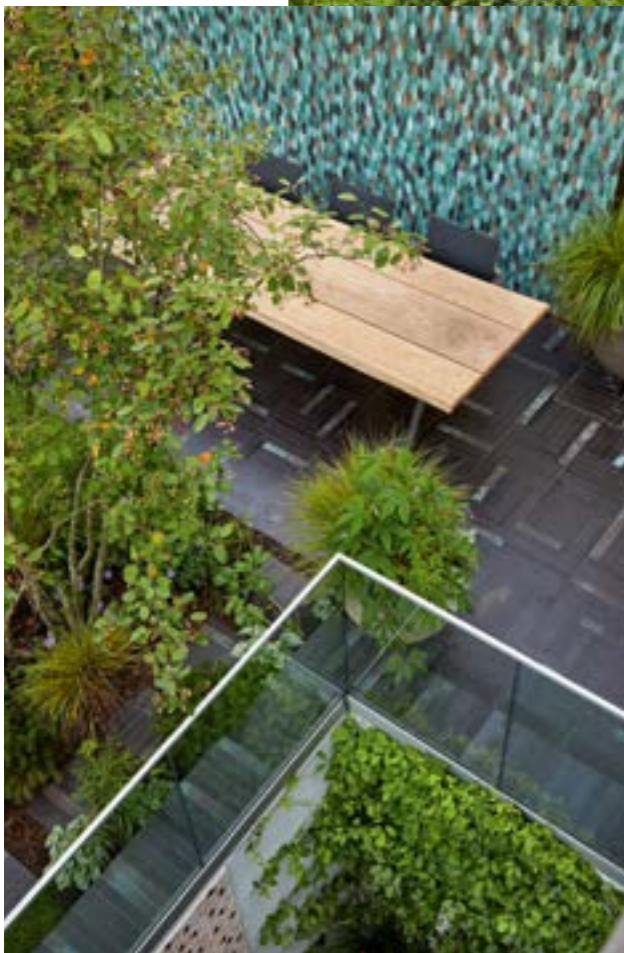
Hardiness zone USDA 9.



Above Even in narrow beds, Stefano's planting is beautifully layered with clumps of *Luzula nivea* and *Libertia chilensis* and domes of *Osmanthus delavayi* under the *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* and against an evergreen backdrop of ivy.

Left This aerial shot shows the lightwell, home to another feature wall in a lighter palette, which complements the colours of the berries of *Amelanchier x lamarckii*. This area is planted with the broad-leaved sausage vine *Holboellia latifolia*, a vigorous, scented evergreen climber, whose green leaves are tinged purple-bronze in new growth.

Below The delicate, pink blooms of *Astrantia* 'Roma', fluffy, white flowers of *Luzula nivea* and purple *Geranium Rozanne* (= 'Gerwat'), alongside the arching grass *Anemanthele lessoniana*, are a pretty combination for a shady corner on the dining terrace.



MAKING A STATEMENT

In this small London garden, innovative materials and sympathetic planting combine to striking effect

WORDS NATASHA GOODFELLOW PHOTOGRAPHS ALISTER THORPE

Landscape architect Stefano Marinaz has a rule that he tries to avoid using the same materials twice. To that end, he is always on the lookout for the new, the beautiful and the interesting, and so when he spotted some lustrous 3D tiles at an interior design show in Paris a few years ago, the attraction was immediate. "Their pattern reminds me of leaves," he says. "I instantly wondered if I could use them in a project."

The opportunity presented itself in early 2020 when the owners of a new-build in Balham, south London, approached Stefano to redesign their garden. At that point the rhomboid-shaped plot was entirely laid to

lawn, something the clients were keen to retain for their two young children to play on. They also wanted more interest, more structure, and a place to eat in the shade.

This last requirement turned out to be the key to designing the whole space. The shadiest part of the garden was the north-facing boundary wall – a tall, blank fence over 3m high with an unsightly wire mesh above it. But to turn a dark, featureless area into a suitable dining area would need a little magic, and Stefano recalled the glimmer of the tiles. Using panels of the ceramics arranged at random, he has created a striking feature wall that both anchors the new dining area and acts as a focal point for the garden as a whole, while detracting from the buildings beyond. ▷

Above Stefano has placed the trees (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* on the left; *Amelanchier x lamarckii* on the right) to lead the eye around the garden and break up the regularity of the lawn. Multi-stemmed trees are slower growing and therefore good for smaller gardens.



The interior decor provided the inspiration for the colour palette in the garden – a seductive mix of bronze, mulberry, jade and turquoise



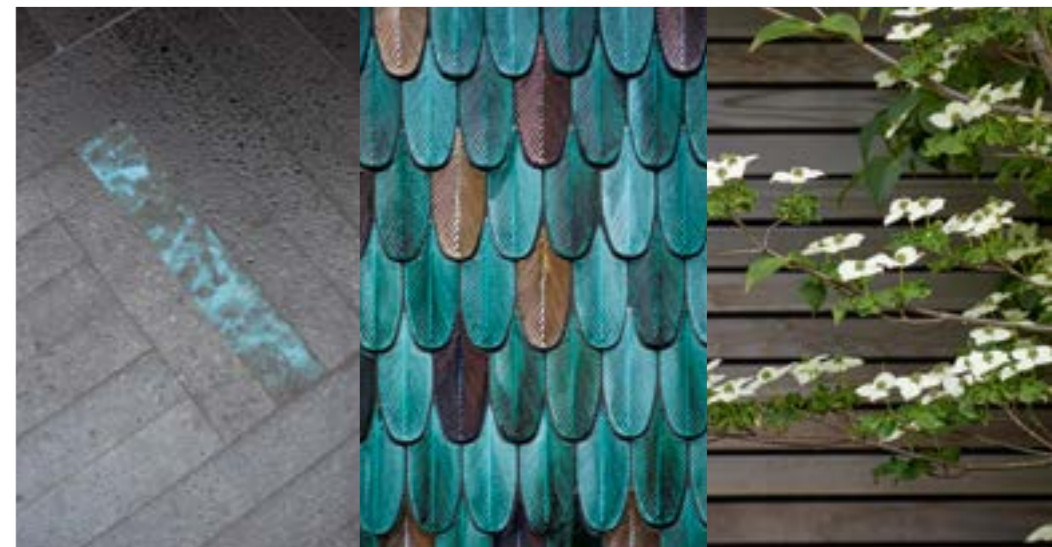
MATERIALS

Shown right (from left to right)

The beautiful paving slabs (also used to edge the retaining wall of the lightwell) are lava stone from Nero Sicilia (nerosicilia.com). The iridescent blue sheen comes from metal particles in the stone, which are transformed in the firing process.

While flat colours will capture shadow play, incorporating distinct shades or textures is a great way of making a feature wall more interesting. These tiles from Botteganove (botteganove.it) were laid at random in pre-prepared panels for easier assembly.

Three walls of the new-build garden were fenced with horizontal, red cedar cladding, which Stefano decided to retain. Now slightly aged, its greyish tones blend well with the paving and tiles, while providing a good neutral backdrop for the plants.



Above Stefano could have built the feature wall in blockwork but instead chose a steel structure with a metal edge, which blended better with the finish of the house and the colours elsewhere.

Right above Pots placed in borders add interest and height. On the left is *Hardenbergia violacea*, an unusual Australian evergreen climber with purple flowers in mid-to-late-winter.

Right below At night, downlighters illuminate the dining area while the uplights highlight the structural framework of the trees.

▷ The clients have used touches of bronze in their interior decor and Stefano took this as the starting point for his colour palette – a seductive mix of bronze, mulberry, jade and turquoise. To ensure the wall does not jar, he has echoed these colours in the planting and the dark lava stone paving slabs, some of which contain metal particles that give them an iridescent blue tint.

The purplish tones of the new spring foliage of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* to the left of the terrace match the darker tiles, while the russet hues of *Anemthele lessoniana* continue the glint of the bronze in their repeat plantings around the lawn. Another plant, the unusual shrub *Rubus lineatus*, not only has young stems the colour of claret, its deep veining could have been the inspiration for the tiles themselves.

Stefano has reshaped the lawn to sit perpendicular to the terrace and house, and has used multi-stemmed trees (*Amelanchier x lamarckii* and *Cornus* ‘Norman Hadden’ along with the katsura tree, as well as three smaller *Osmanthus x burkwoodii*) to break up the rectangular shape. “The three larger trees are placed like a triangle and help lead the eye around the space,” he says. The *Osmanthus* do a similar job, while also working well in the narrow borders, a result of the need

to maximise the lawn. And though these borders may be slim, they burst with interest, planted with dwarf mountain pines *Pinus mugo* ‘Mughus’, pittosporums and grasses for evergreen structure, as well as bulbs, including *Narcissus* ‘Thalia’ and *Allium sphaerocephalon*, and perennials such as *Astrantia major*, *Geranium* Rozanne (= ‘Gerwat’) and *Libertia grandiflora*.

Unexpectedly, the borders also contain several pots planted with eye-catching combinations including *Brunnera macrophylla* ‘Jack Frost’, *Kirengeshoma palmata* and *Epimedium x warleyense* ‘Orangekönigin’. “I like using pots in planting beds,” says Stefano. “They provide an extra layer of interest, structure and height.”

But the greatest surprise comes perhaps as the sun goes down. Subtle lighting means that the garden is every bit as usable – and as inviting – in the evening as it is during the day. Downlights illuminate the feature wall and dining area, while strategically positioned spotlights show off the trees to their best, gilding their stems and making their canopies glow. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Stefano’s work at stefanomarinaz.com

