

IN BRIEF

What Small, private, urban garden.
Where London.
Size Approximately 10m x 6m.
Soil Imported sandy topsoil to replace paved areas with planting beds.
Climate Temperate and southwest-facing, but partly shaded by trees and surrounding buildings.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Light and shade

In this small London garden, designer Stefano Marinaz opted for dense planting lifted by the rich tones of the hard landscaping and furnishings

WORDS KATE JACOBS PHOTOGRAPHS ALISTER THORPE

Stefano Marinaz has dramatically increased the planted areas of this small, split-level garden. The existing York stone paving has been relaid in bands of varying widths to create enough space for a seating area. Shades of terracotta and off-white recur throughout the space via the pots, lighting and furniture.



Above The garden couldn't accommodate another big tree in addition to the existing *Catalpa bignonioides*, so Stefano added a large pot with a multi-stemmed *Amelanchier x lamarckii* that filters the views of the garden from the conservatory.

Left Along one side of the garden, the planting is interspersed with tall Atelier Vierkant pots, creating a sense of rhythm. These are filled with plants including *Erigeron karvinskianus* and *Daphne x transatlantica* Eternal Fragrance (= 'Blafra').

Below At lower-ground level, two large, off-white pots illuminate this shady part of the garden and create a water feature, fringed by planting including ferns *Dryopteris affinis* and *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum* 'Silver Falls'.



Landscape architect Stefano Marinaz does not believe in change for change's sake. When he was asked to work on this back garden in London's Chelsea for the couple who live there, he was keen to evaluate its existing strengths and weaknesses. "On every project, I always ask myself why we need to change existing features. If there isn't a good reason, then we don't," he explains. Back then, in 2016, the garden was given over to York stone crazy paving, with only a skinny border of planting around its edges. The boundary fences were mismatched, while a curving staircase of grimy London stock bricks led down to a small pond at lower-ground level. "The flat fence drew your eye right to the end of the long, narrow plot rather than contributing to the beauty of the garden," says Stefano.

The whole space was shaded by a mature *Catalpa bignonioides* tree, which Stefano was keen to preserve, "because of its aesthetical value". It is now pollarded back to a height of five metres every three years. The *Catalpa* and the shade it provides inspired the woodland planting scheme here. "A shady garden has become more welcome during our increasingly hot summers," says Stefano. He dramatically increased the planted areas to cover more than half of the garden, with deep beds along one side – around the base of the tree – and at the back of the garden, so that the owners feel immersed in greenery. "I like to keep the hard landscaping simple and maximise plant diversity. I'm always keen to celebrate the beauty and variety of nature; it's good for the owners to have interest through the seasons and for biodiversity too."

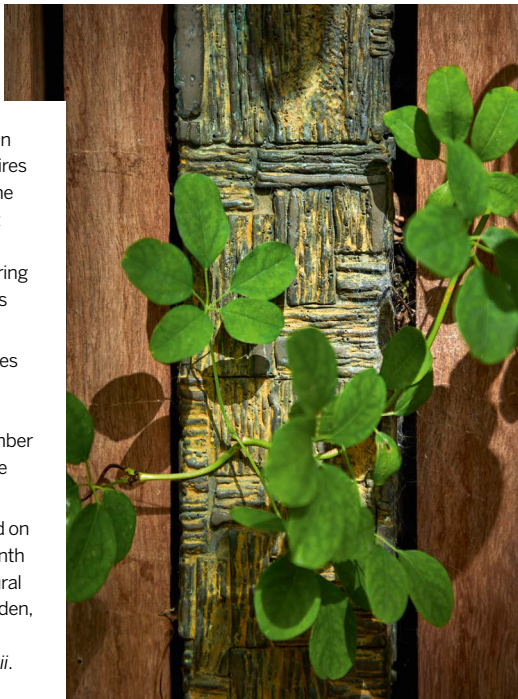
Starting the growing season with "spring ephemerals", from *Galanthus nivalis* to *Narcissus* 'Thalia', Stefano relies on emerging perennials such as *Epimedium x rubrum* and *Epimedium x warleyense* 'Orangekönigin' to hide the bulbs' yellowing leaves. Then there's the interest from lime-coloured bracts of *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae* and *Luzula nivea* flowers as well as foliage plants such as *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'. *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, with its tall spikes of trumpet-like flowers, is planted ▷



Left The small size of this garden made it easy to run overhead wires across the space, allowing for the suspension of outdoor pendant Taiki lights by Paola Lenti in different colours and sizes, to bring light to the seating area, which is sited away from the house.

Right Two of the boundary fences combine Iroko slats of varying widths and depths with bronze uprights, cast using intricate timber moulds, to create rich but subtle visual interest.

Below A fish sculpture mounted on a simple, black-painted steel plinth appears to float above the textural perennials to the rear of the garden, including *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, *Luzula nivea* and *Mukdenia rossii*.



▷ in clusters of three. “They don’t flower every year, so I plant them in a clump and hope that one will flower each summer.” *Mukdenia rossii* was chosen for both its autumn colour and spring flowers, and *Rodgersia aesculifolia* for the way its foliage catches the light. As the garden is overlooked by the house, there’s an emphasis on evergreen planting with *Daphne odora* ‘Aureomarginata’ and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, while winter scent comes from shrubs such as *Sarcococca confusa* and *Edgeworthia chrysantha* ‘Red Dragon’.

The materials palette is full of rich but subtle texture and patina. The York-stone paving was taken up and partially relaid – in bands of differing widths – with just enough paving to comfortably site a table and to access the steps. The brick around the steps needed only a good clean to restore its mellow tones, with the gloomy pond replaced by a pot-based water feature, nestled among lush ferns.

The boundaries needed careful attention. Stefano opted for Iroko, with four different widths and depths of timber, to disrupt the contours of the garden, disguising an awkward ‘L’ shape at the rear of the plot. Set into the fence at irregular intervals are sculptural bronze uprights, imprinted with the form of the timber mould used in their construction – creating an intricate but low-key textural detail.

The rich tones of the Iroko, bronze and terracotta are picked up in the garden furniture and lighting, bringing a sense of warmth to this shady space. The table, sited away from the house, needed its own light source. Stefano opted for a cluster of pendant lights that make the garden feel enclosed and private. “Given the small size of the garden, we were able to tension three stainless-steel cables to attach the lights, each with a different size, colour and hanging height, so there’s a sense of movement.” The colours and curving forms echo those of the pots, adding to the pleasing sense of coherence in this small garden. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

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

Simple water features for small gardens

Water features can do so much for a small garden; they create focal points, and encourage wildlife, and the soft murmur of water brings a sense of tranquillity. Here, Stefano has created a water feature using two Atelier Vierkant pots, which the Belgian pottery waterproofed specially. These are the same shape as the terracotta ones used in the main garden, but with a white finish to brighten this lower-ground level area. On to these, Stefano has set two custom-made Rimex discs, with a textured bronze finish, punched with holes through which the water bubbles up, each with a little LED light to give them a subtle glow after dark.

A simpler option, which Stefano chose for his own garden, is to use a fibreglass pot, without drainage holes, with a pump and LED light. He advises positioning it in full sun or part shade, with a minimum depth of around 55cm, to allow waterlilies to flourish, while marginal plants can be elevated using an upturned pot. Stefano likes to set such containers among the planting, but the pot should be sited on a concrete base if not on a hard surface. A pump is essential to avoid mosquitoes, which dislike running water, but it can be connected to a timer that creates water movement two or three times a day.

Stefano sets his pump to come on for al fresco breakfasts and in the evening, when the lights ensure it remains a focal point.

