

In the pink

Are you harbouring plans from your armchair of a garden revamp next spring? Then take inspiration from this makeover of a tricky plot. By Emma Reuss. Photographs: Marianne Majerus

Although he's not grumbling, garden designer Stuart Craine is the first to admit that it's the colour that has earned this Notting Hill garden so much notoriety. It isn't bashful rose or Suffolk pink. This is super-hot, ultra-brazen, temperature-raising, screaming pink. And he didn't choose it.

The brief to Craine was, as with so many small town gardens, to make the best use of space so his clients could entertain, their children could play safely, with planting that didn't need massive maintenance and that made sense of the plot's dramatic change in levels.

The garden is east-facing and surrounded by three-storey terraced houses. When Craine was called in, it was dark and damp, with shallow, dilapidated brick steps, slimy with growth, that spanned the width of the space in an unrelenting climb to 2m above base. The view



from inside must have been grim.

"The key was in making the garden relate to the interior, maximising the space, while managing the level change so it didn't eat up half the garden," Craine says. The house was in the process of being renovated, so he was able to liaise with the builders, who cut out the slope to facilitate a neat, not-too-steep flight of stairs to rise through a retaining wall, taking two 90-degree turns on the way. This opened up a significant area outside the glass windows, and Craine decked this with ipe hardwood (splinter-free = child-friendly). The retaining rendered block work walls incorporate planting areas and, together with brushed stainless-steel planters, wring out every possible opportunity for soft landscaping.

Through the sliding glass windows of the basement, the lower part of the garden appears to extend from the room. Pink upholstery and fabric inside the room (these came first) pick up the exterior colour, without feeling overwhelming. The planting is vivid - in spring, the long low trough running parallel to the house is a storm of *Azalea* 'Hinomayo'; while above, at eye level, 'Orange Beauty' and *Camellia* 'Anemoniflora' clash pleasingly. More slim steel containers run along the boundaries, filled with *Liriope* 'Big Blue', cistus, roses,



and campanulas to provide succession and *Trachelospermum jasminoides* for continuity.

Adjacent to the stairs, more than half of the width of the retaining wall is given over to a silver-leaf water feature that really comes into its own at night when it shimmers and glows. This was built by Alexander Stuart-Menteth, who also provided the bespoke steel planters and glass gates installed at the top and middle of the stairs as a safety feature for the children.

This arrangement, when seen from the inside, follows a series of staggered horizontal lines: bands of pink render (even the risers on the stairs) interspersed with rectangles of stainless steel and stripes of planting, punctuated centrally by a cube of box that "floats" in mid-air. Although the eye is constantly led upwards, it's not possible to see beyond the final and highest layer of box hedging, giving the lower part of the garden an intimate, private feel.

The upper level is much simpler: a surface of sawn sandstone, walls of evergreen climbers and a dining table. The garden suddenly becomes

very grown up. A certain amount of screening is achieved by a row of pleached *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer' that celebrate the start of the open-air supper season with an eruption of white blossom (albeit some time before thoughts of actually venturing outside to eat can be entertained).

The pleached trees standing in a bed mulched with beach pebbles draw a line between the adult and child spaces: beyond the trees, palatial bespoke playery awaits the children, along with an artificial grass surface that, when lifted, reveals a sandpit.

And that screaming colour? That was the client Rosie Hoare's idea. But it wasn't until the garden build was well under way that pink was decided upon. "The render was finished and the general consensus was to go terracotta and I can't stand terracotta," says Hoare. "When we decided to go with the pink, the whole thing came together for me." **Stuart Craine Design, stuartcraine.com, 020-8964 0992. Find a garden designer at The Society of Garden Designers, sgd.org.uk.**



What to do this week

APPLE OFFER

Apple Ruby is a crisp, sweet dessert apple with - go on, guess - a bright red skin. The apples ripen early in the season, yet will store for several months: a pretty handy combination. Plant in full sun. Buy one bareroot tree on M9 rootstock for £22.95, or two for £35.90 (prices include UK mainland p&p). To order, call 0330 333 6851, quoting ref GUPW257. Supplied from mid-November onwards.

ROSE REVIVAL

Old, overgrown roses can turn woody and tree-like, with few flowers at the top of long branches. Chopped to the ground now, they have an amazing capacity for rejuvenation. This is kill or cure, so best to do it if it's on its final warning anyway. Use loppers to make diagonal cuts just above an outward-facing bud, then mulch with well-rotted manure to give the plant a boost.

NO IF'S OR BUTTS

With watering low on the agenda, now is the moment to empty your water butt and give it a clean out. Algae builds up over the year and makes for a gunky bottom and green water. You may be able to blast the slime with a hose; otherwise, climb in and get scrubbing. Some leave butts empty over winter for fear of them freezing and splitting, but a full butt is unlikely to freeze solid, and it seems a waste of good rain-gathering opportunities. Wrap the tap with a cloth or bubble wrap to prevent damage. **Lia Leendertz**