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Outdoors Homes & Property

Taking outdoor spaces to another level

The owners wanted a modern garden, outdoor dining and a play area. And that's what they got

WHEN the owners of this Queen's Park house built a new kitchen extension, they wanted a garden that would reflect its contemporary qualities and make the two spaces one.

A outdoor dining area that afforded privacy from neighbours and a play area for their small children were also on the list, as well as a request to integrate a small and awkward basement area with the rest of the garden.

Enter landscape designer Stuart Craine, who specialises in transforming town gardens into functional – and fabulous – outdoor spaces.

The usual designer's device of simply extending the interior floor outside to make a smooth flow was not an option, because the kitchen floor is concrete. Instead, Craine laid decking of ipe wood throughout the garden, which, though hard-wearing, is more forgiving and feels warm underfoot.

"I referred back to the house interior," says Craine, "by picking another material: the brushed stainless steel of the kitchen island." He used this to help mesh the small basement space with the rest of the garden, installing a brushed stainless steel wall of cascading water that can be admired from the kitchen. "The steel is also light-reflective, so brings light into the basement."

The rest of the garden was all one level, which is rarely a recipe for a thrilling outdoor space. "Different levels create interest," says Craine, who created that interest – and solved the lack of privacy problem – by sinking the dining and barbecue area into the ground by just under half a metre and surrounding the area with rendered retaining walls painted the same off-white as the kitchen walls indoors. "There was a lot of work involved in excavating but it made a huge difference to the look of the whole garden," he says.

He also added an overhead pergola of green oak, which creates a feeling of intimacy and makes a handsome garden feature. "A pergola is a great

Cool connection: stainless steel on the wall outside makes a link with the kitchen island



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Pattie Barron



way of making a flat garden three-dimensional, and in a small town garden, where space is limited, you have the opportunity to grow climbers." His choice was the semi-evergreen *Akebia quinata*, which has lime-green leaves, chocolate-coloured, fragrant flower clusters in spring, and small orange

fruits in autumn, as well as the more familiar purple clematis *Royal Velours* and, at the shadier back of the pergola, white-flowered *Hydrangea petiolaris*. He also planted glamorous white agapanthus at the edges of the dining area to bloom at this time of year.

Instead of using more conventional timbers across the pergola roof, Craine used stainless steel wires. "The pergola is a big, heavy structure, and I wanted something to lighten it as well as provide an adequate framework for climbers." The big investment in the garden, however, wasn't the

dining area or the decking – it was a tree. Craine flew to Italy to select a magnificent and mature *Magnolia grandiflora* from a specialist nursery. "It is 70 years old and 20 metres high," says Craine. "It also works well with the lush, slightly tropical evergreen planting I chose, and creates privacy for the dining area."

Privacy comes at a price: approximately £12,000, which includes the cost of winching the tree into the garden. Its real role, however, is priceless as it makes this new garden look established.

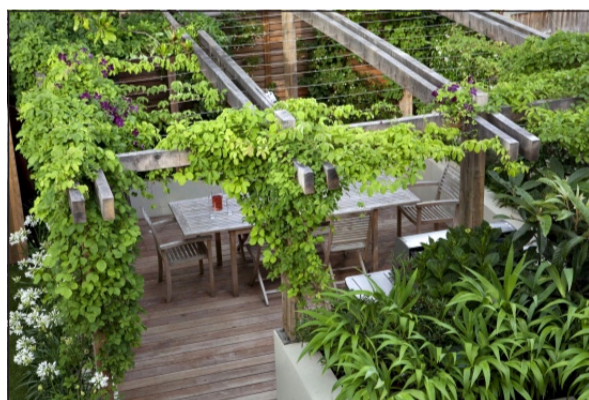
■ *Stuart Craine can be commissioned through his website, stuartcraine.com*

DON'T MISS follow Pattie Barron's gardening blog at homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs

Photographs: **Marianne Majerus**

Step into luxury: a sunken dining area (far right) with overhead pergola creates an intimate and welcoming space

Pole position: an oak pergola (right) makes the most of vertical space with a variety of leafy climbers



See it buy it

See it: RHS Hyde Hall Flower Show

LONDON garden designers frequently plant agapanthus because of its strong, architectural silhouette and showy, high-summer blooms. See them at their best this month at RHS Garden Hyde Hall: A. Midnight Blue contrasting with purples and oranges in the farmhouse garden; dark-flowered A. Windlebrooke in the dry garden, and A. Polar Ice in the white section of the herbaceous border.

This Friday until Sunday, 10am-5pm, there is another incentive to visit: a flower show with nearly 50 exhibitors of specialist nurseries and garden merchandise. For flower show breakfasts, which include premium parking and a garden tour, from £19.95 per person, book on 0845 612 1253. Visit rhs.org.uk for more details.



Blue heaven: Agapanthus in bloom now at Hyde Hall

Buy it: RHS lobelias

THESE robust Fan Series lobelias flower prolifically from midsummer to early autumn, on upright spikes. The RHS offers three of each of the following three varieties for £8.99, supplied as plug plants: *Lobelia x speciosa* Fan Burgundy, with tubular red flowers growing to 60cm; Fan Blau, violet-blue, growing to 70cm, and Fan Lachs, pink on reddish-brown stems, growing to 60cm. The collection costs £17.97, saving £9, but Homes & Property readers can save a further 15 per cent by entering code 310812 at the checkout at rhsplants.co.uk before midnight August 28.



Perennial beauty: Lobelia Fan Lachs