

The deep pink was the client's idea, after she rejected the proposed terracotta. She was inspired to be bold with colour by the cobalt walls of the Jardin Majorelle in Morocco

The contrasting building materials work well together, each balanced perfectly so nowhere feels hemmed in or limited

Think pink


Designer Stuart Craine MSGD is the first to admit that it's the colour of this smart Notting Hill garden that has attracted so much media interest

Words Emma Reuss Photography Marianne Majerus

The clients were completely refurbishing their house in Horbury Crescent when Stuart was first called in to look at the garden. East facing, surrounded by three-storey terraced houses and with a large horse chestnut in the far corner, it was dark and damp. Shallow, dilapidated brick steps, slimy with growth, spanned the width of the space in an unrelenting climb to two metres above, and the view from inside must have been grim.

As with so many small town gardens, the brief was to maximise the space so the clients could entertain and their children play safely. They wanted a garden that didn't need massive maintenance, and which made sense of the dramatic change in levels.

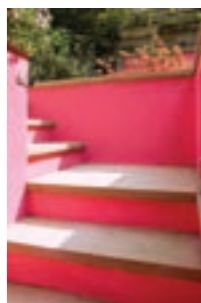
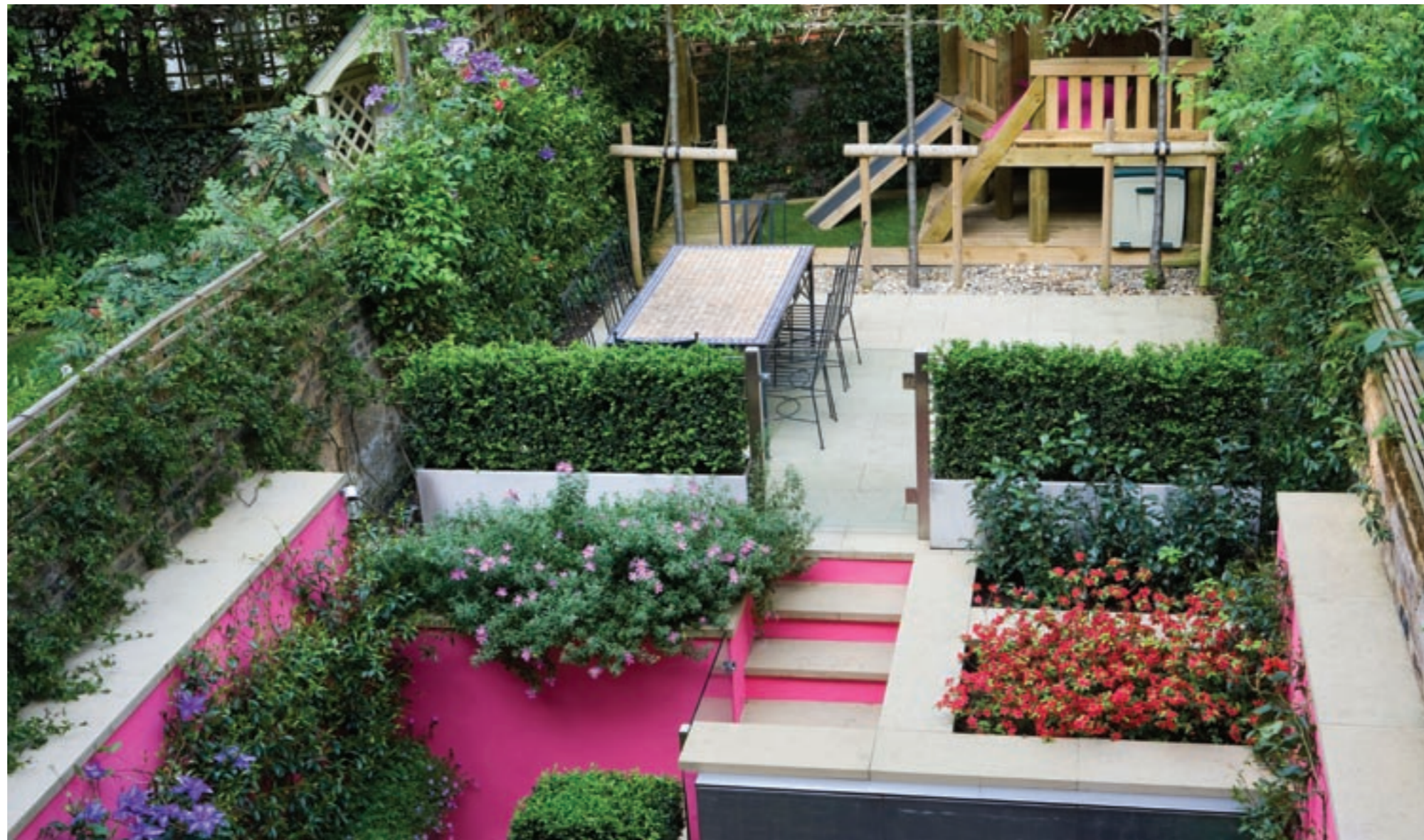
"The key thing was to make the garden relate to the interior and maximise the space, while managing the level change so it didn't eat up half the garden," Stuart explains. "We were brought in at a really early stage and the clients had a very clear brief of what they wanted; they were the most organised clients I've ever had." Colour aside, the result is a very sophisticated garden design that confidently achieves all the client requirements.

Stuart was able to liaise with the surveyors and builders working on the house and they cut out the slope to facilitate a neat, not-too-steep flight of steps to rise through a retaining 

Right: The custom-built, silver-leaf-clad water feature casts shimmering ripples across the deck at night

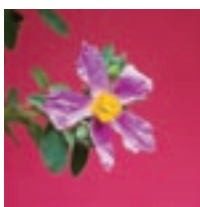
Main photo: The huge disparity in elevation has been accommodated with two distinct levels linked by steps

Below: The bright, tonal planting in steel troughs ranges from pink through to purple and orange



Above: The hues in the garden connect with those in the interior

Left: Stuart Craine's computer model for the garden



⤷ wall, taking two 90° turns on its way. This opened up a significant area outside the glass windows which was decked with ipe (splinter-free equals child-friendly). The retaining rendered blockwork walls incorporate planting areas and, together with brushed stainless-steel planters, wring out every last possible opportunity for soft landscaping.

Through the sliding glass windows of the elegantly modern basement the lower part of the garden appears to extend from the room. Pink upholstery and fabric details inside the room (these came first) pick up the exterior colour, without feeling overwhelming. The planting is vivid and absolutely works – in spring, the long, low trough running parallel to the house is a storm of *Azalea* 'Hinomayo'; while above, at eye-level, *Azalea* '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. Stuart's assistant at the time, Lucy Roberts, had a major hand in the choice of plants. "Lucy did a brilliant job – she totally understood what we wanted" says client, Rosie Hoare.

Adjacent to the stairs, more than half of the width of the retaining wall is given over to a silver-leaf-backed water feature, which 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 which '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 more simple: 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* 'Chanticleer', which celebrate the start of the open-air supper season with an eruption of

The colour for the render was the clients' idea, but the build was well under way when pink was decided upon

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 definite line between adult space and child space. A palatial bespoke playhouse hides behind them, along with an AstroTurf lawn surface, which when lifted reveals a sandpit beneath, providing a soft landing for tumblers.

The contrasting building materials, work well together, especially the different surfaces which, with their distinct textures and colours, define the function of each area, each balanced perfectly in size so that nowhere feels hemmed in or limited.

The paint colour for the render was the clients' 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 Rosie. "When we decided to go with the pink, the whole thing came together for me. It gives you continuity through to inside". The couple are frequent visitors to Marrakesh and love the vibrant colours used in the gardens and buildings there. Rosie saw what a difference a brightly

coloured backdrop could make when she visited the Jardin Majorelle, with its eponymous cobalt blue walls, and this experience inspired her to make such a bold selection. The colour is a winner. Not only does it link the interior to the exterior, it provides a brilliant foil for the planting, which pops out against it, providing manifold layers of form and texture to tempt the eye; a useful and successful trick for such a space.

Stuart's style varies from job to job and he is not looking to do a run of pink gardens. "I try to design what feels right for the space as well as following a client's brief – the immediate space, the broader surroundings and the atmosphere the client wants to create."

Many ingredients have combined to meet the level of success this garden achieves: a clear-minded and organised client with strong ideas on colour; a dynamically good design full of clever details, that meets the brief in the most practical, space-efficient and visual way and a designer with, Rosie says, "an amazing address book and a great team". The upshot is a really uplifting, usable space that overcomes its gloomy situation by radiating wellbeing and good cheer. ☺

About the designer



Like many garden designers, **Stuart Craine MSGD** came late to the business. The Asian financial crisis of 1998 cut short his Jakarta-based banking career and he ended up back in London, selling

garden furniture sourced from Southeast Asia. He struck up a friendship with horticulturalist Joan Clifton and helped her at the Chelsea Flower Show, prompting him to enrol for a garden design course at Capel Manor College. His first break came when a friend from Asia moved back to London and asked him to design a tropical-style garden, which led to further commissions. Most of Stuart's work now is through architects such as London based Michaelis Boyd Associates, who are refurbishing buildings in a contemporary style, and his gardens reflect this.

www.stuartraine.com

Sources

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