

Owned by two architects, the terrace has spectacular views over London's skyline, from the steeple of the 18th century church of St Leonard's to the gleaming Broadgate Tower and the Swiss Re Building, better known as the Gherkin.



The architects' eyrie

Fringed with flowers, an East End roof terrace makes the most of a spectacular urban skyline

WORDS CAMILLA PHELPS PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

The East End of London may be vibrant and colourful, but unlike much of the capital city, green space is hard to come by. A glance upwards, however, to the top of a converted warehouse in the centre of hip Shoreditch, just might reveal a haze of bees and insects buzzing merrily above a cloud of plants.

This unexpected haven of prairie perennials is perched on a rooftop four storeys up. It's a raspberries-and-cream coloured froth of sedums, penstemons, gauras and grasses that reflects back the warm red-brick buildings and chimneypots. Although the space is tiny, the rooftop panorama is vast, spanning 240 degrees across a dramatic skyline of church spires and tower blocks, right across to the east of the city, with the new railway that will be ferrying people to the Olympics cutting right through the middle. This roof terrace is the perfect antidote to a gritty landscape.

Architects Damita Yu and Dylan Baker-Rice bought, designed and converted the whole building and last but not least, wanted a green roof to attract wildlife. Having overcome the challenges of planning permission, structural viability and waterproofing, they approached garden designer Sara Jane Rothwell in 2008.

The interior boasts some very individual features and Damita and Dylan had strong opinions about what they wanted for the roof terrace. This had a major influence on Sara Jane's approach. "In my initial design I wanted to square things off, but I discovered

that they wanted to accentuate the acute angles," says Sara Jane. "I went through more designs than for most gardens but I didn't mind because I really enjoyed the process. I feel I wouldn't have come up with this had I not been pushed."

Every millimetre of the 6m by 8.7m area has been used judiciously. It makes a comfortable extension of the living space below as barbecue, dining and baby play area, while also supplying herbs for cooking.

The tricky angles of this asymmetric space are highlighted through the diagonals of the cedar decking and the lines of steps and seating. Detail is everything in this tight space: from the benches designed to fit the natural angle of legs when seated (see overleaf), to the hidden storage and the rainwater recycling tank that feeds the irrigation system. Everything has to earn its keep, both visually and practically.

One feature that Damita and Dylan insisted on was an unconventional balcony balustrade – they specified orange plastic barrier fencing mesh as used on building sites. Initially, Sara Jane was unsure about this, but in this uber-industrial setting, she agrees that it works perfectly. It makes a witty visual reference to all the building work going on in the area and looks great juxtaposed with the soft, country-style planting.

With all the hard angles, the planting softens and knits the design together, the meadow and planters blending almost seamlessly. Damita and Dylan were amazed and delighted at how quickly the wildlife

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▷ found the garden – and even the snails that make it to the fourth floor are welcome.

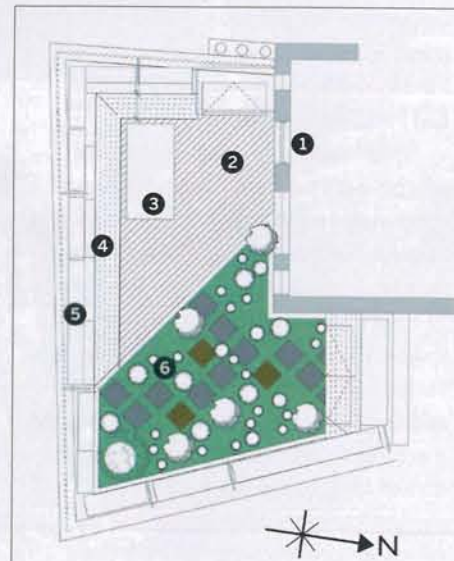
“I always try to persuade clients that this style of planting will work,” says Sara Jane. “In this case, it’s a hard, industrial skyline and it helps to soften everything. Plus there are biodiversity benefits, and you can leave some of the plants for their winter silhouettes.”

As well as choosing plants for wildlife, drought tolerance and colour, successional interest was important. *Alchemilla mollis* brings fresh spring green flowers, *Papaver orientale* ‘Patty’s Plum’ gives early summer impact, flat-topped *Achillea millefolium* ‘Cerise Queen’ in summer gives way to

Sedum ‘Matrona’ with *Penstemon* ‘Andenken an Friedrich Hahn’ (=‘Garnet’) in autumn.

“The palette of colours was a key thing. The soft pink hues pick up the brickwork, plus these plants lend themselves to dry roof terraces. I love the way the penstemons spill over and want to take up more space than they should. That was all part of the look.”

Sara Jane’s brief was to create a green roof, but not a typical roof terrace. And the success of her design is proof that although it’s hard to ignore the surroundings, it really does have more of the atmosphere of a country garden in the sky rather than a rooftop in the heart of the city. □



Key elements

WHAT Roof terrace on a four-storey warehouse conversion.

WHERE Shoreditch, East London.

SIZE 6m x 8.7m.

SPECIAL FEATURES Bold use of angles, drought-resistant planting in soft colours.

MADE BY Garden designer Sara Jane Rothwell, tel 020 7700 4354,

www.londongardendesigner.com

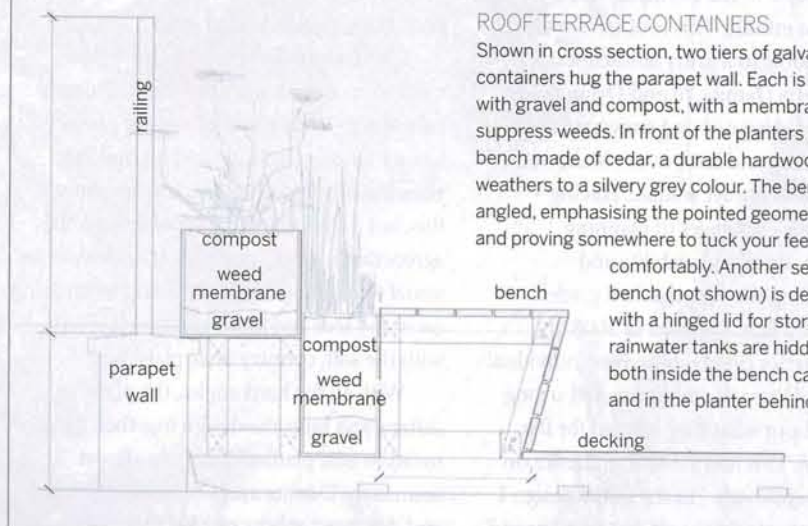
CLIMATE Broadly south-facing site, with some shade from neighbouring buildings.

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Apartment | 5 Galvanised containers |
| 2 Decking | |
| 3 Table | 6 Planting |
| 4 Bench | |

ROOF TERRACE CONTAINERS

Shown in cross section, two tiers of galvanised containers hug the parapet wall. Each is filled with gravel and compost, with a membrane to suppress weeds. In front of the planters is a bench made of cedar, a durable hardwood that weathers to a silvery grey colour. The bench is angled, emphasising the pointed geometry, and providing somewhere to tuck your feet

comfortably. Another section of bench (not shown) is designed with a hinged lid for storage; rainwater tanks are hidden both inside the bench cavity and in the planter behind.



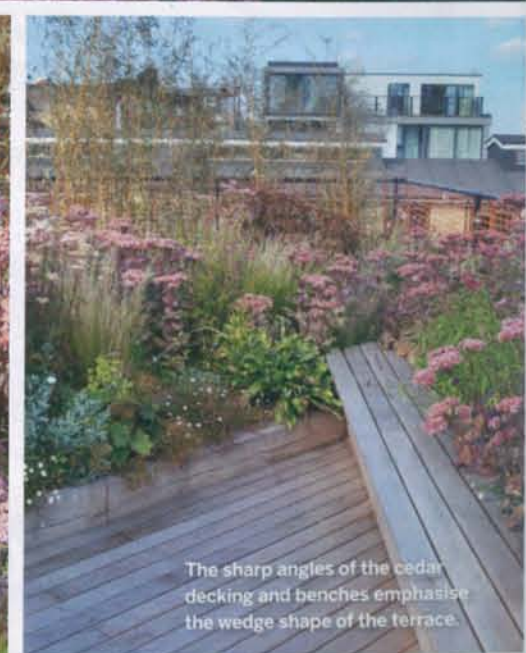
Soft pink perennials punctuated with tufts of *Nassella tenuissima* (the grass formerly known as *Stipa tenuissima*) contrast with the stone and brick of the city scape.



Designer Sara Jane Rothwell plants aromatic herbs for scent and for use in the kitchen.



Sara Jane’s drought-tolerant planting is dominated in late summer by the faded pink flower heads of *Achillea millefolium* ‘Cerise Queen’ and purple stems of *Sedum* ‘Matrona’.



The sharp angles of the cedar decking and benches emphasise the wedge shape of the terrace.