

CASE STUDY

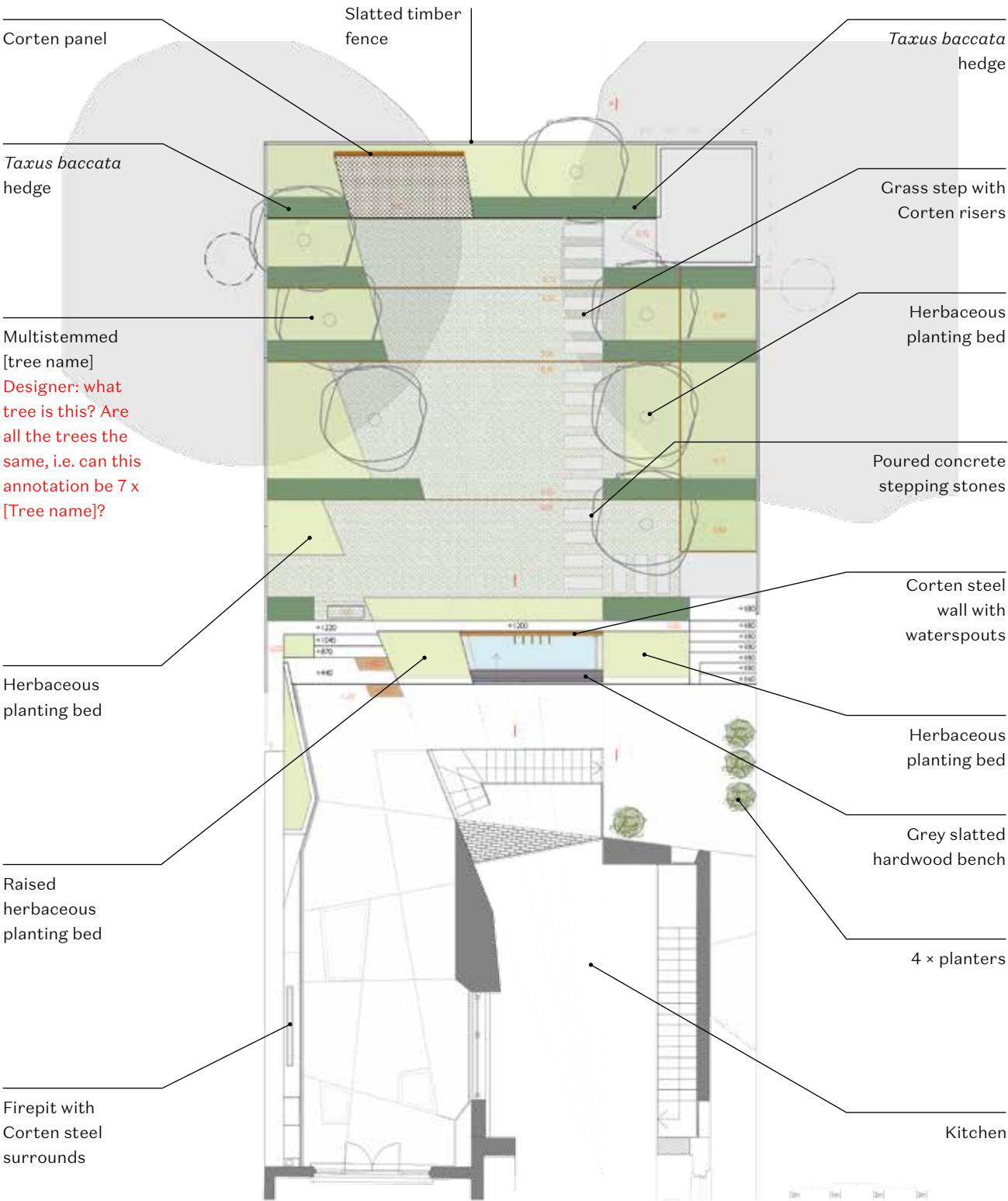
Overcoming Shade

SARA JANE ROTHWELL

This design shows how a minimal palette of materials and plants can create a wonderfully theatrical effect. The house itself is Arts and Crafts, but with a new brick extension, which includes floor-to-ceiling picture windows that open onto the garden. The back of the garden is heavily shaded by overhanging trees, but you'd never realise it as the design overrides this with strong horizontal bands of bright greens and reds. There is a lovely symmetry as you look from the kitchen to the soft grey, slatted hardwood bench set in the concrete walls of the water tank. The rusted Corten steel wall of the tank has been inset with five copper waterspouts that create a vertical display of constantly falling water. Planters on either side are filled with *Anemanthele lessoniana* (pheasant's tail grass) which gives colour and texture through the year. The tank is crested with a broad band of red *Persicaria affinis* 'Superba', a plant that is both striking and easy to maintain; this sets up the eye for the rising bands of lawn behind. Each grass step is banded with Corten steel risers and flanked by receding yew hedges. Finally, the eye comes to rest on the back wall with its panel of rusted steel and the grey slatted fence that mirrors the bench and water feature below. It's a brilliantly executed effect and hugely satisfying to look at. The genius of the design continues in a side patio and dining area where the greys are repeated in the polished floor and poured concrete walls. The gas firepit surrounds are finished with Corten steel. At night, underlit glass floor panels, wall lighting and the firepit illuminate the eating area.

Right: A clear geometry underpins this design. Looking from the house, a sense of space is created by the horizontal lines of the water feature topped with contrasting bands of the pink blooms and bright green foliage of *Persicaria*.





OVERCOMING SHADE

Design Checklist

1. Learn to manage dry shade. This affects many town gardens. The best way round the problem is to grow shade-tolerant plants. In the heavily shaded upper area under the mature trees in this garden, cool white and fresh green planting lights up dark corners. The lawn has also been laid with a shade-tolerant grass mix.

2. Install instant warmth. Corten steel surrounds the wall firepit, which is set into the poured concrete walls. The owners can turn on the 1.8m- (6ft-) long

gas burner with the flick of a switch. This is ideal for people who don't want to be bothered with logs and matches.

3. Think about the geometry of your space. This garden is focused on the kitchen, and one of the design briefs was to encourage the owners to spend more time outside. By using the lines of perspective the eye is naturally drawn towards the end of the garden.

4. Stick to a restrained palette for a powerful effect. Here, the hard landscaping is created from hardwood iroko timber, rusted steel, poured concrete and polished cement.

5. Take the indoor aesthetic outside. In this garden, for example, the rusted Corten steel in the garden echoes the colours and materials of the sculptures inside the house. One area flows seamlessly into the other, enhancing the views in both directions.

6. Choose your seating carefully. In this garden the pale and understated dining chairs and table chime with the minimal simplicity of the underlit glass floor panels and the slatted timbers of the iroko bench below the water feature, as well as the fence on the back wall.

7. Position features to block out unwanted views. In this garden, the rusted Corten steel panel feature has been deliberately placed against the back left wall so that it hides the top of the neighbour's shed.

8. Repeat planting to create impact. The key plant in this garden is the red *Persicaria affinis* 'Superba', an easy-going perennial with lovely, spiked flowerheads and bright green foliage. It is an ideal plant to offset the rusted Corten steel and also works beautifully with the dark green of the yew hedges.



OVERCOMING SHADE

The Details



Persicaria affinis 'Superba' sprawls naturally over the poured concrete on top of the water feature.



Lighting features prominently in this garden, including wall-mounted fixtures and underlit glass floor panels.



Slatted iroko hardwood seating is both chic and hard-wearing.



Poured concrete stepping stones set into the lawn.



At night the underlit glass floor panels, gas firepit and wall lights add warmth to the view from the kitchen.



The planting bed is lined with a geotextile membrane and then filled with a layer of drainage material topped with lightweight soil. The utilitarian copper spouts (actually gas piping) will turn verdigris in time and stand out against the rusted steel.



The yew hedges are clipped into sharp 90-degree angles to emphasise the geometry of the garden.



Anemanthele lessoniana (pheasant's tail grass), shown in the foreground of this photo, looks good all year round.

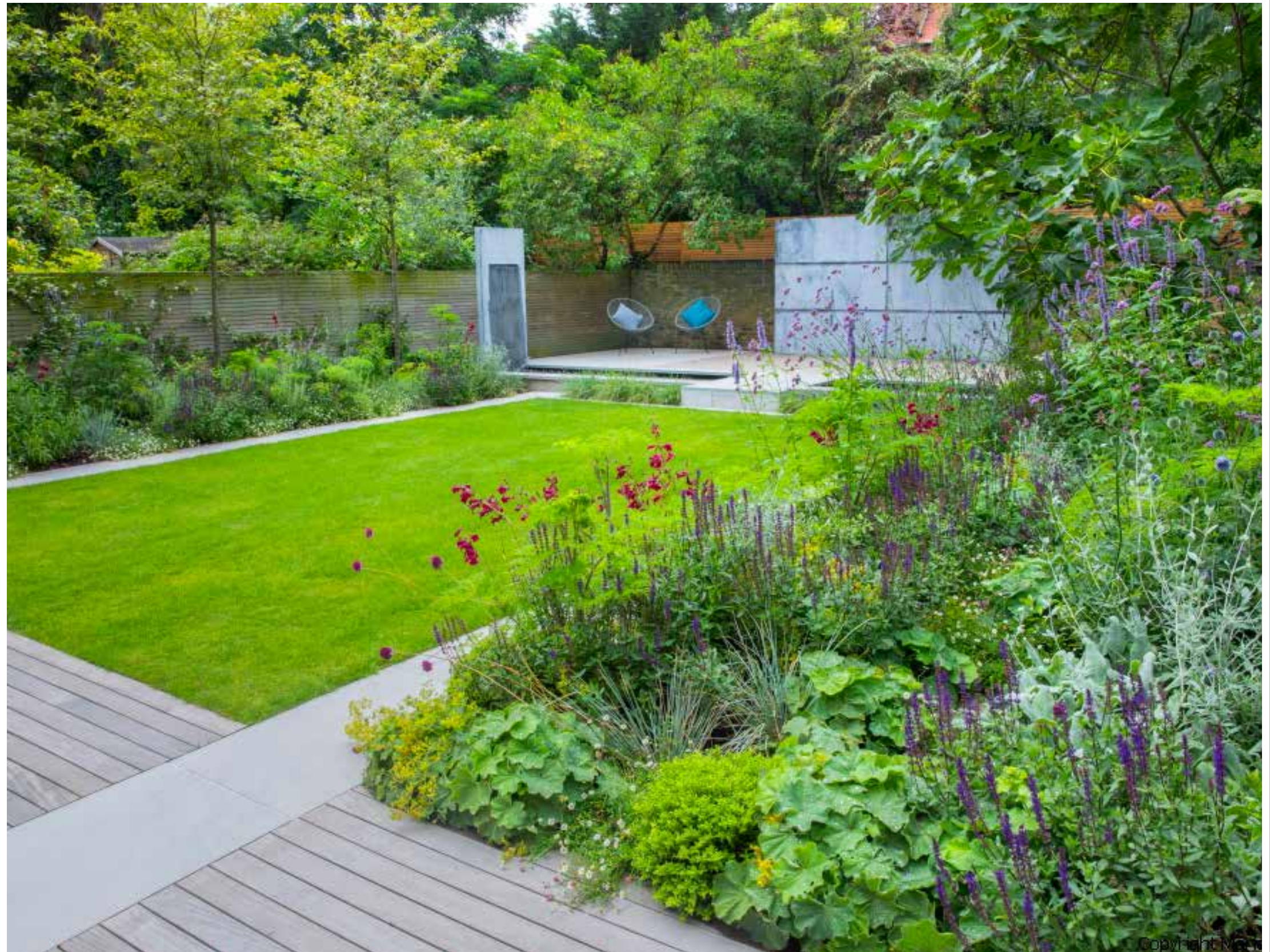
CASE STUDY

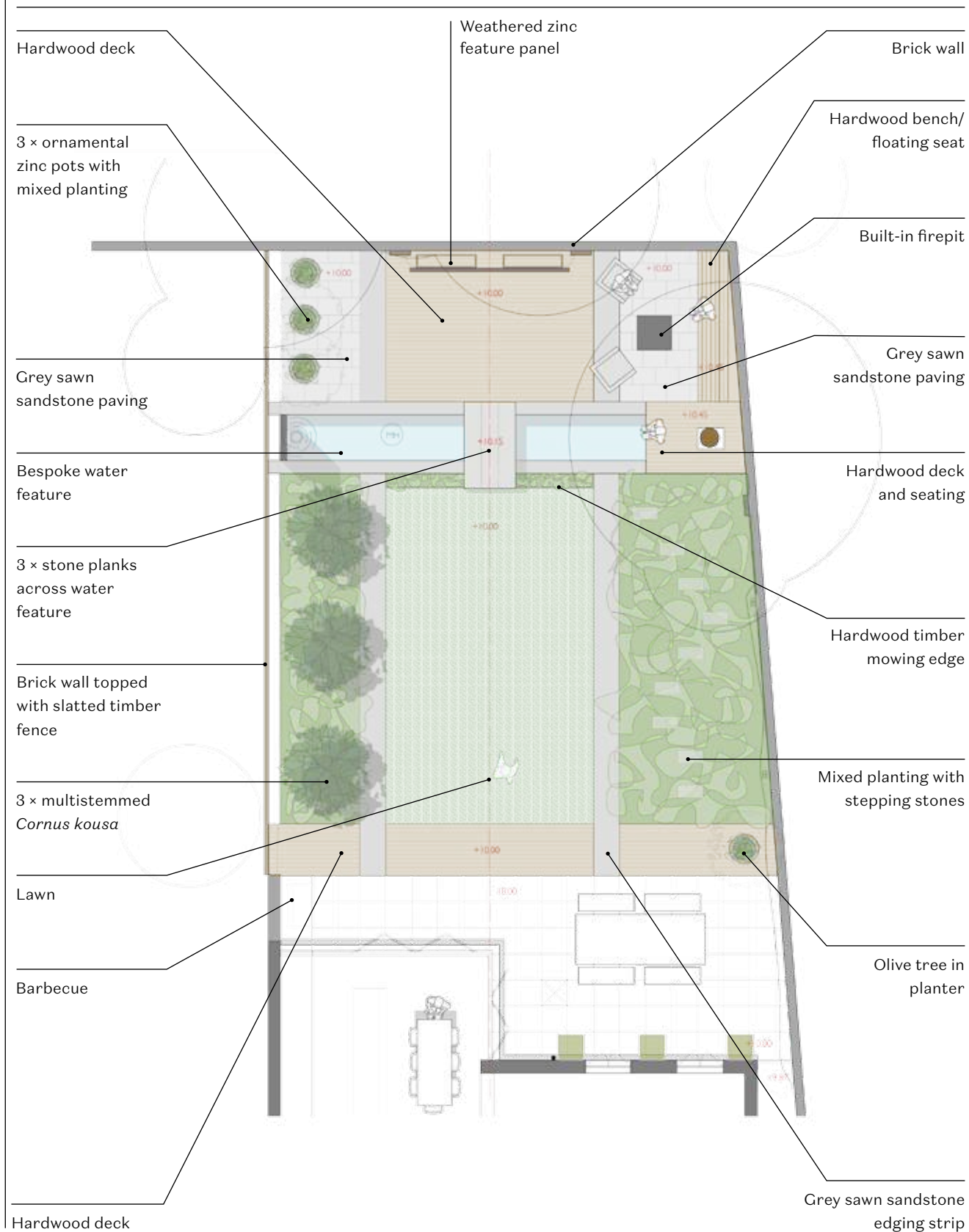
Simple Chic

SARA JANE ROTHWELL

At face value this seems a wonderfully serene and simple design, but its structure is carefully underpinned by balancing forms, styles and textures. There is a calm reassurance in the repeating rectangles of the lawn, the zinc panel with its blue-grey patina, and the almost-black pools. Pale stone planks of sawn grey sandstone form dynamic edges, and paths stride purposefully, yet everything is softened and merges with the planting. This is achieved by using a coherent palette of colours across the garden – greens and whites, soft greys, purples, blues and mauves and, here and there, a strong accent of magenta. In spring, bulbs emerge, giving a blast of brights to kick off the season. As with all Sara Jane Rothwell's gardens, what is beautiful is wherever possible also practical, so the beds contain hidden stone steps to allow gardeners to look after the plants. Even the weathered zinc panel has space behind it where cushions from the built-in timber bench can be stored. The garden also echoes the property, a brick London townhouse with strong contemporary features, notably the floor-to-ceiling steel windows that look out from the kitchen to the garden. At night the owners can look over the lawn from the house towards the underlit water feature. A row of young amelanchier trees on the left is gently uplit, drawing the eye along the side wall. Their silhouettes are just as strong in winter as summer, with a firepit enabling the owners to continue enjoying the shortening evenings.

Right: The underlying geometry of the design brings this garden together. The shapes and forms of the soft and hard landscaping repeat and echo in the rectangles of the green lawn and the zinc rear panel, as well as in the lines made by the paths and water feature.





SIMPLE CHIC

Design Checklist

1. Create drama with carefully positioned lighting, as here with these three fastigate *Amelanchier* x *grandiflora* 'Robin Hill'. By uplighting the water wall and the deck at the end of the garden, a sense of depth and space is created, linking the garden to the house.

2. Achieve the lived-in look. The zinc panel on the rear wall has been coated with a protective T-Wash to create an instant effect of aged metal. The lovely, soft grey-blue of the panel is then picked up in the palette of blues and mauves in the planting.

3. Work out where the sun falls
at different times of the day. Here, the deck hugs the boundary wall and so seating has been placed where it will catch the evening sun.

4. Give the garden a natural effervescence by providing a structure of evergreen shrubs interplanted with herbaceous perennials and highlights of seasonal colour.

5. Keep what you can. Take time to work out what works and what you really cannot abide. An existing fence can be spruced up with a lick of new paint or transformed with new climbers. If possible, untie any climbers that you want to retain or prune them back in order to allow for repainting the fence.

6. Cover brick walls with climbers
to soften and 'green' the boundaries. Here, jasmine and campsis have been trained along one of the walls, while an

existing rose was retained and rambles through a green wall of ivy. When choosing roses always check that they won't be too large for the space.

7. Find the best varieties of the plants you like. One salvia really will be different from another. Some flop, others are sturdy, some have green stems, others a deep purple. Rather than nipping to your nearest garden centre to buy an approximation of what you want, look online to find a plant nursery and get the real thing. It will do better and last longer.

8. Go for the 'wow!' factor. Choose flowers that excite you. Designing a garden is a little like styling an interior, so think about contrasts and textures. Here, plummy *Penstemon* 'Raven' is paired with fine, purple-stemmed *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and the acid-green, floral puffs of *Alchemilla mollis* (lady's mantle). These are all great garden-worthy plants.

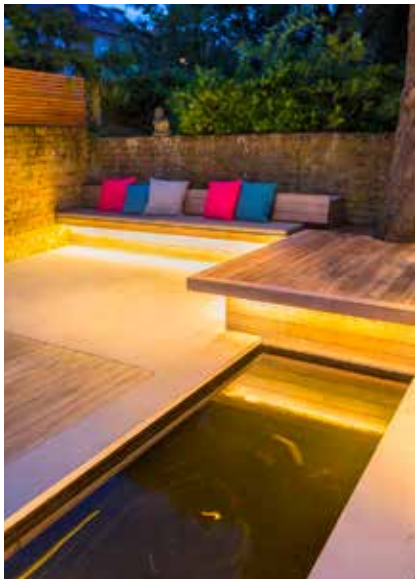


SIMPLE CHIC

The Details



The contemporary water-wall fountain creates constant sound and motion as it falls.



Bright cushions encourage you to sit on the built-in timber bench.



Verbena bonariensis copes well in many conditions and is here combined with *Selinum wallichianum*.



A stone mowing strip separates the lawn from the bed, which is spilling over with *Alchemilla mollis* (lady's mantle).



The pools are divided by an elegant bridge of three stone planks.



Water lilies come in many colours and sizes. Choose a small-leaved variety for a small pool.



The zinc-coated, galvanized-steel water wall, which is 1m (3ft) tall, pours water into the pool when activated.



This storage panel has ample space behind it for storing the bench cushions in winter.

CASE STUDY

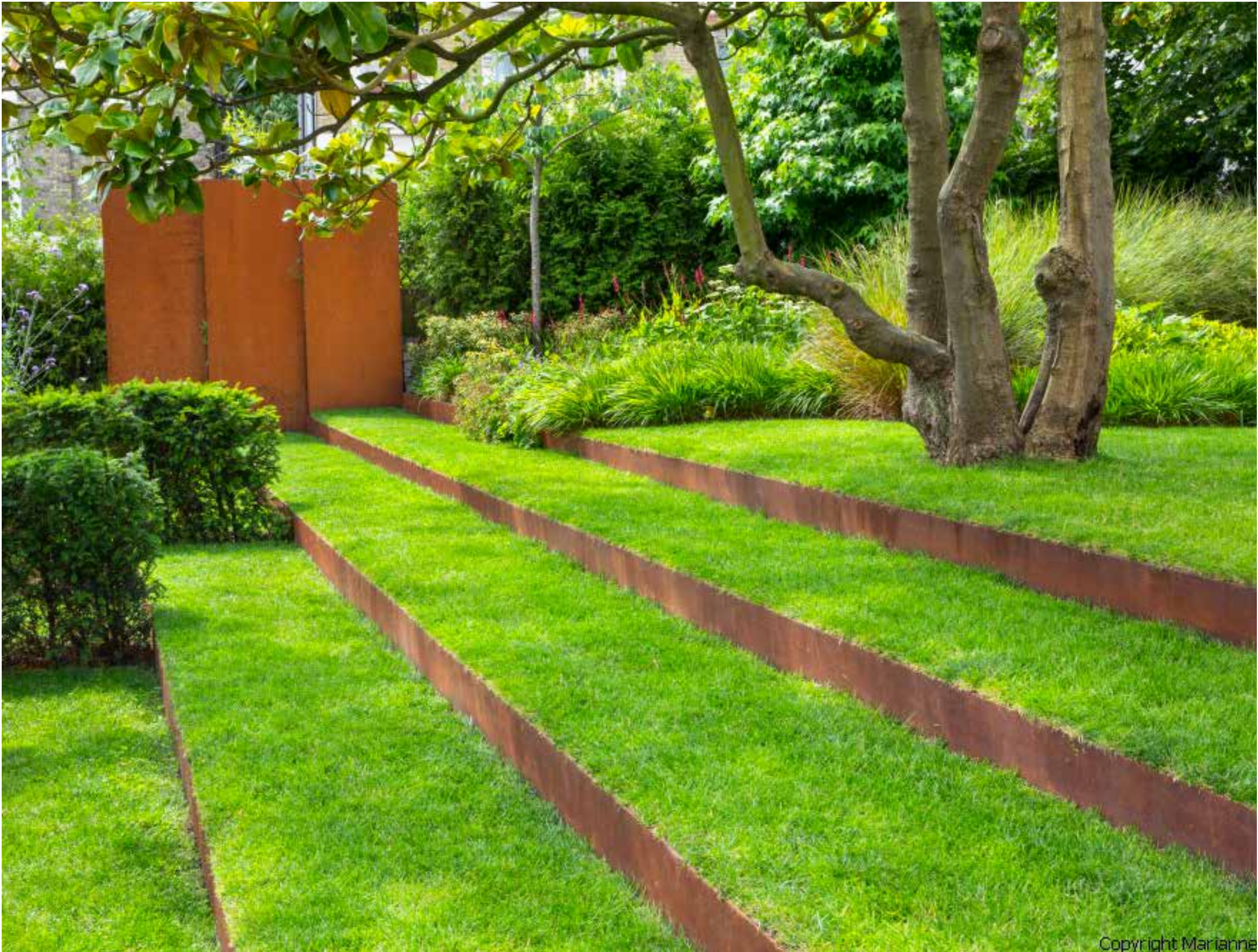
Statement Steps

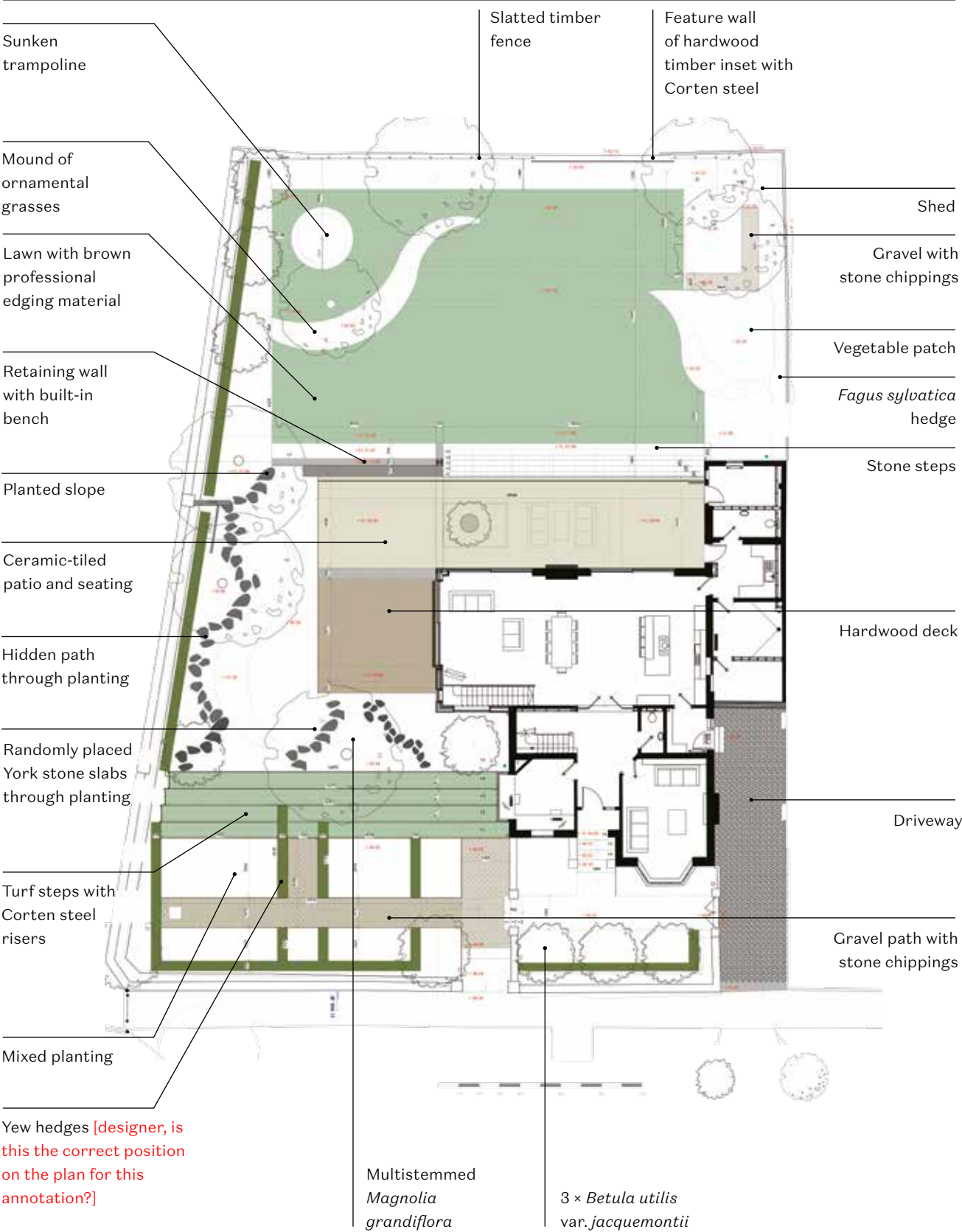
SARA JANE ROTHWELL

This wonderful garden, at 1,000sq m (10,800sq ft), wraps around the property, which was built in the 1920s as part of a new garden suburb. The aim of the design was to open up the garden, while also providing privacy from overlooking windows. The redesign takes as its focus a lovely old *Magnolia grandiflora* with its huge leathery leaves and characterful multistemmed trunk. Generous turf steps lead up to the tree and the rusted Corten steel risers are echoed on the left in three feature panels, creating an elegant, minimal feel. At the top of the steps is a hardwood deck that travels around the corner of the house to a broad patio at the rear. Herbaceous borders of blousy mixed plantings soften the edges and give this garden a painterly feel, while yew hedges break up the lines and add a visual link to the dark hedged border.

Closer to the house, the hardwood decks have weathered to a warm grey colour that blends with the pale grey sandstone treads and pearl-grey, non-slip ceramic tiles. Very deep planting beds enable plants to thrive and give of their best, while stepping stones allow for ongoing plant maintenance. There's a balance between planting and pleasure in this garden. The large lawn is softly edged with gently mounding foliage and the trampoline is sunken and hidden behind a mound of ornamental grasses. Seating and dining areas are expansive and inviting. A timber bench, built into a retaining wall, offers permanent seating, while a feature wall comprising hardwood verticals inset with Corten steel brings all the elements together.

Right: Wide turf steps are edged with rusted Corten steel, giving the design a bold yet natural look. The magnificent *Magnolia grandiflora*, with its Japanese-like elegance and gnarled trunk, has become the focal point of the upper garden.





STATEMENT STEPS

Design Checklist

1. Waste not, want not. Set aside excavated topsoil to reuse. Here, it has been recycled into sweeping land mounds and to create the wide green turf steps. Rubble-strewn excavations can be used for foundations.

2. Make the most of rusted Corten steel. This highly versatile material has a myriad of different uses and is popular not only because it can be cut into step risers (as here), planters, water tanks or sculptural forms, but also because it works well with other natural colours.

3. Make paths last longer by first laying down a weed-suppressing membrane. Stabilised gravel can be laid on top of this and then topped with small stone chippings in a colour that reflects the surrounding architecture.

4. Hide unattractive elements such as trampolines behind plants. Here, the trampoline has been sunk in the ground and hidden behind a land mound planted with ornamental grasses.

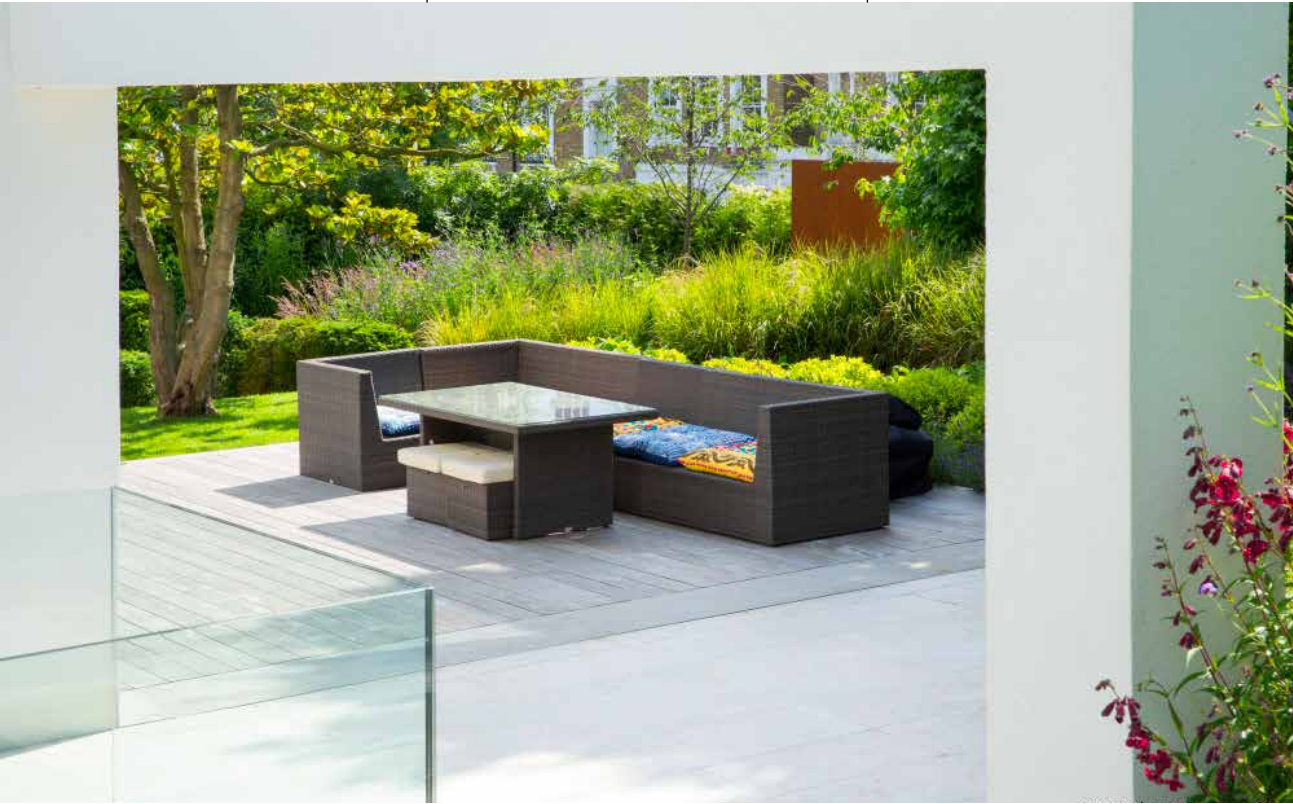
5. Provide access to large mixed planting beds for both gardeners and explorers by creating hidden paths of randomly placed stone slabs that weave through the planting.

6. Make sure the hard structures in your garden earn their keep. In this garden scheme a timber bench (which echoes the hardwood timber deck) has been set into a retaining wall, providing seating for the length of a dining table. Over the years, timber weathers to a

lovely soft grey, which will give a warm and natural feel to any garden.

7. Use soft LED strips (available by the roll) to light up a feature, seating area or, as here, a sculptural boundary wall. LEDs transform indoor and outdoor lighting options, giving gardeners much more flexibility.

8. Edge paths and lawns. It might sound old-fashioned, but professionally edged paths and lawns look better and last longer. They also save you having to recut edges by hand. So, overcome prejudice and use a professional edging material to maintain a smart finish.



STATEMENT STEPS

The Details



Make a feature of a boundary wall. In this scheme, hardwood timber and rusted Corten steel inserts frame a planting of *Deschampsia cespitosa* (tufted hair grass) and pink penstemon.



Yew hedging provides a solid green foil for a loose perennial mixed planting of salvia, penstemon and calamagrostis.



The flowerheads of *Calamagrostis* x *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' look good all winter. Plant to catch low winter light.



Dot the tall and airy *Verbena bonariensis* through plantings to provide height and drama.



A romantic planting of penstemon, *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' (one of the best forms of salvia) and *Rosa* 'Gertrude Jekyll'.



The turf steps are edged with rusted Corten steel, which immediately turns them into a statement piece.



Contemporary seating with *Penstemon* 'Raven' and the perennial wallflower *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve' planted in the raised bed behind.



Anemanthele lessoniana (pheasant's tail grass) and deep pink persicaria contrast with Corten steel uprights.