

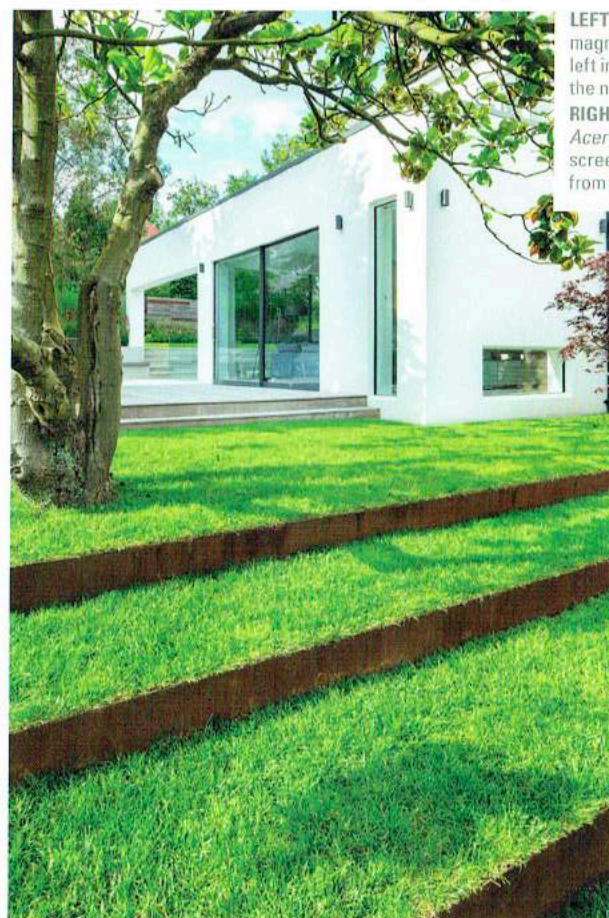


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ANOTHER LEVEL

Sara Jane Rothwell MSGD used sweeping steps and sinuous mounds to transform a steeply sloping site in north London into a functional family garden

Corten steel
risers help
an



LEFT A mature magnolia tree was left in place beside the new house
RIGHT This mature *Acer palmatum* screens the office from the street



Sara Jane Rothwell MSGD

Rothwell worked in film and theatre for 11 years before retraining in horticulture and garden design. The outdoor spaces she designs are characterised by her passion for plants and inventive use of hard landscape materials.

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Sara Jane Rothwell MSGD spent the first 10 years of her working life building elaborate sets for theatre and films, before enrolling on the one-year garden design course at Capel Manor College in 2002. "I've never regretted the career change, but I was perhaps surprised at how directly useful that early film experience has proved to be," she says. "It means I automatically take a multi-dimensional approach to my gardens, based on vistas and focal points – and technical drawing has never bothered me."

So when Rothwell was called to consult on a new project on a corner site in north London in 2015, she was not fazed to find herself looking at a very large hole in the ground. "The client was having a basement extension constructed, and really all you could see was mud."

The garden wrapped round the house on three sides and sloped significantly from front boundary to back. It was this change in level that the client was exploiting by cutting a basement extension across the back of the house. "This meant that the patio opening off the main living space, although apparently at ground level, was effectively a roof terrace. The challenge of the design was to incorporate this into a sensible design solution for the rest of the sloping site." And as if that were not challenge enough, there were several mature trees with preservation orders that restricted Rothwell's scope for regrading levels still further.

Open to ideas

Fortunately the clients were not as difficult to manage as their garden. "We quickly established a good rapport, and

"WIDE TURF STEPS EDGED IN CORTEN STEEL TURN THE FRONT GARDEN SLOPE INTO A SCULPTURAL LANDFORM WITH A CONTEMPORARY AESTHETIC THAT COMPLEMENTS THE WHITE WALLS"

they gave me an open brief. They did insist on a larger lawn than I would have chosen, with a trampoline sunk into one corner, and asked for a few flowers for picking at the front of the house, safely away from their children's footballs. But generally they were interested to see what ideas I came up with."

Rothwell's solution was a bold design making a virtue of necessity. Wide turf steps edged in Corten steel turn the front garden slope into a sculptural landform with a contemporary aesthetic that complements the white walls and plate-glass windows of the house. The clients' study looks along these steps to the side boundary, where Rothwell has installed three Corten panels, which do double-duty as a focal point from the house, and a screen from the curious gaze of passers-by in the street outside.

"We also planted a mature *Acer palmatum* outside the office window to the front of the house, when the client realised that people walking past their gate could stare straight in from the street." Although it was added from necessity, the acer has been an aesthetic success. "The →



ABOVE The patio is built over a basement extension



BELOW LEFT At the rear of the house, the dining area wall retains the upper lawn with trampoline

BELOW RIGHT The front garden borders are more floriferous, with salvia, lavender and penstemons





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