



Divide and rule

Separating your garden into different spaces can make it feel larger, as this London garden proves

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In brief

WHAT Private modern house redesigned by architect owner; garden of 'outdoor rooms' laid out by landscape architect Sam Martin.

WHERE Wimbledon, southwest London.

SOIL Clay with pockets of builders' rubble.

CONDITIONS Relatively sheltered, dry in summer.

SIZE A third of an acre.

SPECIAL FEATURES Architect-designed garden pavilion/outdoor dining room; pond.

GARDEN PLAN See page 70.

Once a parking area, the Pond Court is now a secret garden whose existence comes as a complete surprise to many visitors.





THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT On warm days, owners Richard and Sarah-Jane Holden love to eat out in their timber and stone pavilion.

LEFT The bright leaves of *Tiarella* 'Iron Butterfly' provides good ground cover in the dappled shade beneath the cherry tree.

BOTTOM LEFT Late in the season, a bold swathe of *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude' brings rich colour to this planting by the house.

BOTTOM RIGHT Sam Martin (centre) worked closely on his design with owners Richard and Sarah-Jane Holden.

There are so many reasons gardens come to be; fortunate 'inheritance', happy accident, single-minded vision, collaborative process. Richard and Sarah-Jane Holden's garden in Wimbledon falls very much into the latter camp. The couple bought their home in 1994, a solid, stolid 1950s detached property of the type built across Britain at that time and of modest architectural merit. But the Holdens faced an added twist; by some strange act of planning misjudgment, the house had been orientated oddly, so where a front door should have been, instead there was a blank wall. The loo and kitchen had the best view of the garden, while the major rooms looked north over a neighbour's land. Architect Richard has spent the intervening years re-orientating and re-designing the house into a modern, light, open and dynamic space – which, self-deprecatingly, he refers to as "schizophrenic" – but when input in the garden first began six years ago, the couple sought out the advice of garden designer Sam Martin.

New Zealander Sam had both Richard's professional interest and Sarah-Jane's knowledge and enthusiasm to consider and draw from. She grew up on Booroomba Station in New South Wales, famous both as a sheep station and for its garden. As she puts it, "when you're unoccupied in the bush, you take up gardening". While the first owner of the property had clearly been a gardener and had planted hedges and trees, many of which have been retained as key features in the new layout of the garden, the intervening years and odd orientation of the house hadn't helped to engender a cohesive space.

First the courtyard

The removal of an unsightly conservatory and construction in its place of a new room overlooking the garden led to the creation of a courtyard space to the rear of the house. This is planted mainly with evergreen shrubs, clipped box hedges and swathes of white

busy lizzies, along with a bold drift of glowing *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude' (formerly 'Autumn Joy', pictured below). The centrepiece is a cool and calming L-shaped pool (pictured on opposite page, bottom right) with a raised, weathered-steel trough and gently trickling water spout. The shape and volume of the trough is echoed by a clipped box hedge of the same height, which sits just below the windows of the house. Cunningly, the trough has been designed so that the water level is constantly brimming, while the water spout is, impossibly, halfway down the trough. The secret of this trickery has been shared with me but I have sworn not to tell.

Hedges of varying sizes, including yew, box and the conifer *Thuja*, play a key part in the experience of the garden; screening neighbouring properties, setting up vistas, emphasising or echoing hard landscape features and, most importantly, dividing the overall space into rooms. Perhaps the most impressive of these rooms is the Pond Court (pictured on pages 66-67), a space that until three years ago was used for car parking. Discovering it comes as a complete surprise. Hemmed in by an old yew hedge on one side and the garden boundary wall on another, the space is dominated by two features: a large raised pool that, halfway along its length, becomes a raised bed, and a garden pavilion/outdoor dining room (pictured this page, top left, and opposite page, also top left). The boldness of this design, allied to the simplicity of its arrangement, is arresting. The presence of an *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* and an old, craggy Japanese cherry, combined with the simple execution of the pavilion and the sense of calm reflection engendered by the space, lend a superficially

“The centrepiece is a cool and calming L-shaped pool with a raised steel trough and gently trickling water spout”

THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT An old cherry tree shelters the Pond Court and contrasts with the sleek lines of the pond and raised bed.

TOP RIGHT The feathery foliage of *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* turns from green to gold in autumn. Reaching a height of just 2m, it thrives in the shelter and partial shade of small urban gardens.

RIGHT The old Japanese cherry bears richly coloured autumn leaves, and blossom in spring.

FAR RIGHT An L-shaped pool with raised weathered-steel trough lies next to the terrace at the northern edge of the garden.





The bright leaves of dome-shaped *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Viridis' stand out against the dark hedge on the southern boundary.
RIGHT Clipped box gives the planting a year-round structure.



“ the old hedges have been re-tailored to create ... a suitably ‘schizophrenic’ reminder of the history of the house ”

▷ oriental feel, but the three collaborators insist this is coincidental. And although the space is small, the pool/raised bed design is also cunning. Rather than being rectangular it tapers slightly, creating the illusion that the space is longer than it is. Another simple water feature, this time a copper pipe discharging into a V-shaped raised rill and then into the pool, makes for the perfect background noise.

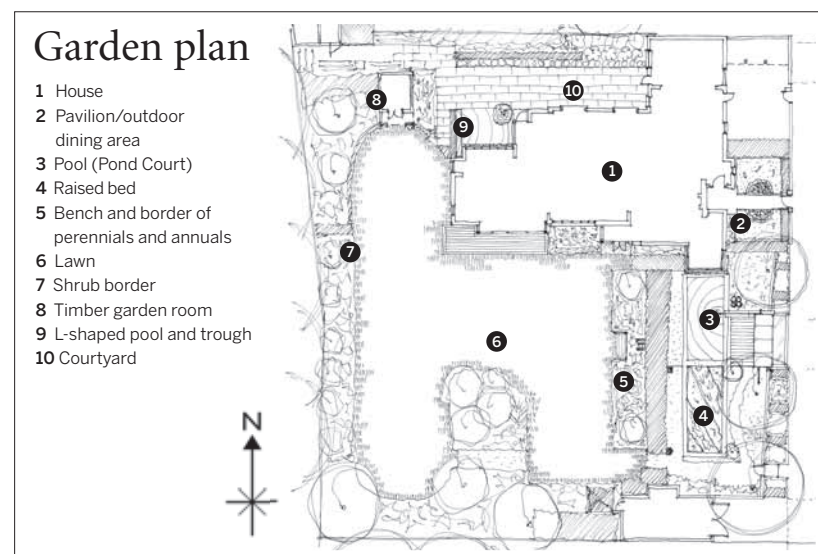
The main part of the garden is simply designed around a lawn. An east-facing bed comprises mainly shrubs, including *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii' and *Cotinus* 'Grace', both of which are resplendent in autumn. The west-facing bed is dominated by

perennials including late-flowering *Aster* and *Helenium*, with annuals such as *Cosmos* and *Calendula officinalis*. Behind these beds the old hedges have been re-tailored to create a structural backdrop and suitably ‘schizophrenic’ reminder of the history of the house, and serve as a reminder of this highly effective collaboration. □

DESIGNER PROFILE

Sam Martin is a landscape architect who designed the New Zealand garden at the Savill Garden in Berkshire and Skyline Central in Manchester, a large commercial scheme, both of which can be visited. He works for Exterior Architecture, on commissions mainly for private clients, including several schemes with garden owner Richard Holden.

BBC Matthew Wilson is a garden writer, designer and lecturer, who appears regularly on *Gardeners' Question Time* (BBC Radio 4, Fridays at 2pm (repeated Sundays at 3pm)).



Mixed perennials and annuals surround a steel seat at the edge of a west-facing border.