



LITTLE WONDER

Two compact gardens, to the front and back of this house in north-west London, have been cleverly designed to harmonise with the building's contrasting façades, maximising the small spaces and creating an easy transition between indoors and out

TEXT ANNIE GATTI

PHOTOGRAPHS MARCUS HARPUR

At first glance, the courtyard garden adjoining the zinc, glass and grey-brick back wall of Hosh Ibrahim's contemporary house in Little Venice is a calming green space anchored by clipped box and hornbeam, and softened by a central bed of perennials, ferns and grasses. But viewing it from either of the monumental glass doors in the cathedral-like, open-plan sitting room, it is clear that this challengingly small east-facing garden, just seven metres by nine metres, has been thoughtfully designed to complement the complex structure of the house – part modern, part Victorian coach house – on the site of a former joinery workshop. 'When I saw how modern the interior is,' explains designer Chris Moss, 'I realised the garden had to be something that reflected that.'

The use outside of two of the interior's key materials – the polished-concrete flooring and the layered porcelain tiles used to form a pleated wall – smooths the transition from inside to out. The sculptural reconstructed-stone table and seats, designed by Sally Mackereth of Wells Mackereth Architects, and the distressed-steel water feature designed by Chris also link with the industrial

Outdoor furniture was designed to complement the interiors, hence the industrial-inspired, reconstituted-stone table and seats in the back garden

detailing in the fabric and interior of the building.

The deck was a necessity – there could be no impermeable landscaping abutting the trunk of the ash, a protected tree – but it allowed Chris to make two levels and to create a number of horizontal planes. These include the clipped-box platform – which has the same proportions as the house's chimney – and the zinc water trough, both of which give the garden its year-round structure. But he also wanted to introduce seasonality, so the central planting varies in colour, shape and height, starting with white and green tulips and lime-green euphorbias in spring; followed by alliums, *Verbena bonariensis*, *origanum*, *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album', *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' and *Arvensis aethusifolius* in summer; and *Anemone* 'Honorine Jobert' and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light' in autumn. As the growing plants start to veil the water trough, they act as a device to draw you into the garden, enticing you to walk round it and enjoy the views, from the off-white rendered side wall, where wisteria is trained in a horizontal band to provide additional screening, to the billowing hedge of cloud-pruned box at the foot of the textured porcelain-tile wall on the other side of the garden.

Along with the courtyard garden, there is another, even smaller garden at the front of the house, where Hosh's bedroom and dressing room are. Sunk below ground level, this private sanctuary, accessed through french windows in the bedroom, has a more relaxed feel and has been designed to sit comfortably alongside the Victorian façade of the house, which is built of London stock brick. The towering outside wall and west-facing aspect could make this a rather dark and dank space, but Chris has used golden Cotswold gravel underfoot – a permeable surface that also allows the multi-stem *Acer campestre* and the beech columns to extend their roots – and the top part of the wall has been treated with whitewash. White valerian and *Calamintha subsp. nepeta* 'Blue Cloud' are encouraged to self-seed through the gravel.

To break up the long expanse of wall, and to create perspective from the three windows that open on to the space, beech columns have been planted to frame three Victorian-inspired vignettes: an auricula theatre made from oak and used all year to display small potted plants; a rustic bench reminiscent of a stumpery; and a cluster of box shapes that are a nod to a shrubbery. 'If you had a narrower site, you could use columns of yew instead,' suggests Chris, 'or even make wooden columns to create the same effect.' Large box balls, scattered randomly on both sides of the path, help to make the space feel wider. The beautiful multi-stem acer against the end wall introduces an architectural note that links, subtly, to the geometry of the back garden □

Chris Moss Landscape and Garden Design:
020-7498 8168; www.chrismogardens.com



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
A zinc trough adds an industrial note.
Box balls draw the eye towards the
textured, porcelain-tile wall. The decking
was a practical solution to avoid harming
the ash – a protected tree. THIS PAGE
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT At the
front of the house lies a smaller garden,
accessed from the main bedroom via
french windows. Contrasting with the
modern back garden, the front garden
harmonises with the Victorian façade of
London stock brick; white valerian and
Calamintha subsp. nepeta 'Blue Cloud'
self-seed in the gravel. A rustic bench
is reminiscent of a stumpery. Potted
plants are displayed in an oak auricula
theatre. A multi-stem *Acer campestre*
creates a focal point at the end wall

