

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

# GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

## BEYOND SUMMER

the planting  
formula for a  
garden that lasts

HOW TO CHOOSE THE  
right bench for  
the right spot

## EXPERT GUIDE TO Agapanthus

for borders, cut flowers and pots

## 5 stylish small gardens

Inspiring ideas to make  
the most of your space



# Blending in

In her own small, west London garden, designer H el ene De Witte has used a limited palette of hard-landscaping materials and plants to create a beautifully blended whole

WORDS CAMILLA PHELPS PHOTOGRAPHS JOANNA KOSSAK / GAP PHOTOS

**W**hen it came to planning her own garden, the starting point for designer H el ene De Witte, was the view through the house to the exterior.

From the moment you set foot inside the front door your gaze travels down the hall and straight through the floor-to-ceiling kitchen windows. Lured by the horizontal lines of the bespoke chestnut fencing, your eye settles comfortably amid the planting.

The garden is typical of many London terraced houses. It has the added challenge of backing on to the brick wall of a three-storey house that creates heavy shade and poor ventilation. Sacrificing the existing borders and small lawn was an easy

decision for H el ene. But with three children under ten, she wanted a garden that worked for the whole family.

A former merchandiser for high-end fashion and interiors brands, Louis Vuitton, Ralph Lauren and Burberry, H el ene retrained as a garden designer with the London College of Garden Design and qualified in 2014. She started work on her garden in 2015 when the basement of her Victorian townhouse was being excavated. She worked closely with her architect and the landscapers, Landform, to make sure the garden offers both a physical and visual link between the basement and kitchen.

“I wanted a strong structure, but also to be able to play around with planting ▶

## KEY ELEMENTS

**What** Small city garden.

**Where** West London.

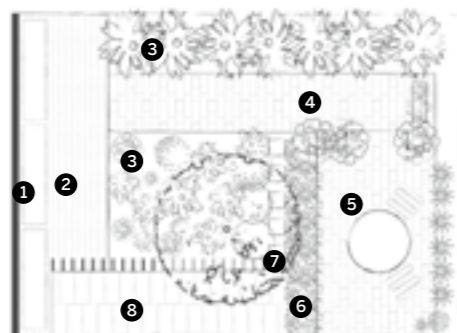
**Size** 5 x 8m.

**Soil** London clay with added bonemeal and annual mulch.

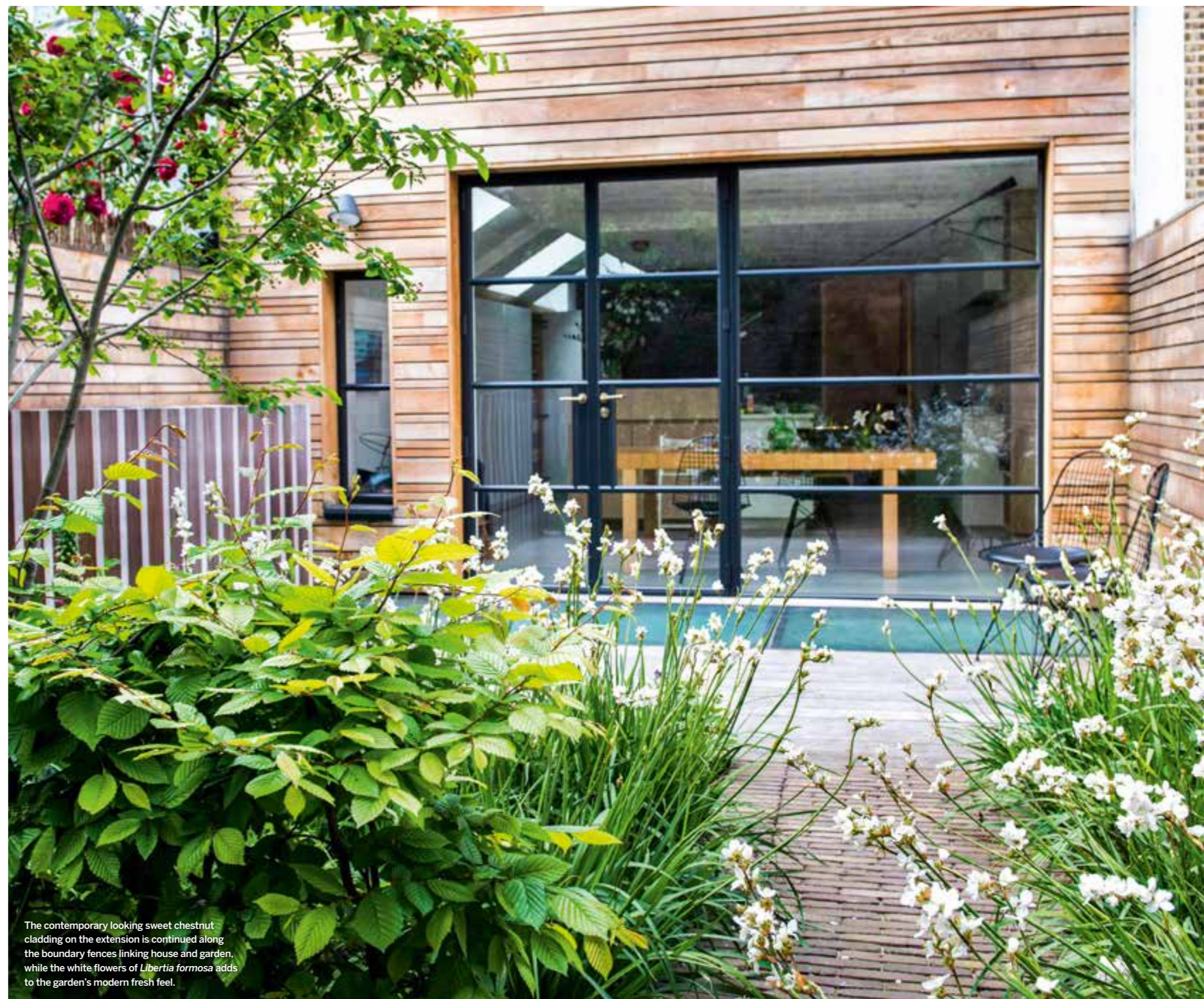
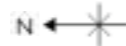
**Aspect** South facing, but shade from surrounding buildings.

**Special features** A tight space that has been given an airy feel using a strong, contemporary geometric design, with fresh planting and a multi-stemmed tree. A clearly defined space that links upper level with basement and extension.

**Designed by** Owner H el ene De Witte (helenedewitte.com).



- 1 Light well
- 2 Iroko decking
- 3 Clay pavers path
- 4 *Libertia formosa*
- 5 Terrace
- 6 Hornbeam hedge
- 7 *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Ballerina'
- 8 Steps down to basement



The contemporary looking sweet chestnut cladding on the extension is continued along the boundary fences linking house and garden, while the white flowers of *Libertia formosa* adds to the garden's modern fresh feel.

PLAN BY LAM MCAULEY

## Hard landscaping in small gardens

Hélène De Witte's five tips for making the most of hard-landscaping materials

**1 In a small garden hard landscaping provides you with continuous structure.** "It should be hard and bold," says Hélène. "The planting is partly there for structure, but partly to soften the hard landscaping. But if you can only choose one plant, make it a tree."

**2 Remember your hard landscape is there all the time.** While you can always play around with the planting, hard landscaping forms a constant backdrop and is both more difficult and more costly to change. "Keep it simple when choosing materials," advises Hélène. "Use a maximum of three different types. And when you make your choice, make a bold statement."

**3 You need unity not uniformity.** Hélène has used a lot of wood for her house's interior and carried this through to the garden to create a feeling of unity between both spaces.

**4 Boundaries are important and they need to work hard in a small garden.** Try to create a balance between greening up your fences and walls and, where the materials you have used are features in themselves, making the most of their solid structure.

**5 Even in a small garden there is room for secret spaces** and exploration. In her own garden Hélène has used a hornbeam hedge to screen off a small, secluded terrace at the rear of the garden. This contrasts with the solid verticals of the iroko posts, which screen the alternate-tread staircase that leads down to the basement.

▷ associations," says Hélène. A multi-stemmed *Amelanchier x grandiflora* 'Ballerina' provides the garden with a soft focal point, and the gentle mix of evergreens and perennials, such as *Libertia formosa*, *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'JS Caliente' and *Thalictrum rochebrunianum*, are a foil for the brighter colours of seasonal bulbs. She tweaks these associations annually to ensure the planting both softens and contrasts with the hard landscaping that defines the space.

When you are outside and look back at the house, you realise the wooden cladding framing the windows and glazed door matches the fence exactly. It's a little like being in a wood-panelled room open to the skies.

"It was quite natural to extend what was happening on the house into the garden," explains Hélène. "We aligned the horizontal lines of the cladding with the horizontal lines on the fence."

This linear pattern sets the style for a design that is strong on geometry. The

verticals and horizontals recur in the materials used and in the planting. From clay pavers to the iroko deck and iroko poles that form the sculptural 'balustrade' for the basement stairs, to the hornbeam hedge. Hélène repeats these patterns to create a simple rhythm as you view and move through the garden. The pathways make it family friendly too, giving the children places to hide and explore. "There is always something going on," says Hélène. "I know the garden as the view from the house, but when you are in it, it is its own space – it feels different depending on where you are."

What stands out overall is the quality and the simplicity of the materials and planting palette and how it all fits together. Each plant, each piece of wood or stone has been meticulously chosen and placed in such a way as to enhance its individual qualities. As Hélène says: "In a small garden like this, you are very close up and the beauty is in the detail." □



**Top** Clay pavers, used for the path and rear terrace, blend beautifully with the London brick of the rear wall, which will soon be clothed with *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Jasminum officinale*. In contrast the sleek, sweet chestnut fences on either side have been left bare.

**Bottom row**

**Left** White-flowered *Libertia formosa* borders the path leading to a secluded rear terrace. Its evergreen, strappy foliage provides a strong structure for contrasting planting through the season: *Tulipa* 'Ballerina', *Geranium* 'Johnson's Blue', *Penstemon* 'Raven' and asters.

**Middle** The flowers of *Dicentra* 'King of Hearts', grown in a pot with *Astilbe* Bridal Veil (*x arendsii*), brighten up a shady corner alongside the potted fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*.

**Right** These Ancienne Belgique clay pavers, from Belgian company Brickworks Vande Moortel (vandemoortel-bricksandpavers.com), were chosen for their naturally weathered look.