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CONTEMPORARY URBAN GARDEN

The Brief

A new, contemporary kitchen extension was being built on to the rear of this three-bedroom, semi-detached property, with large floor to ceiling glass sliders, extending across the width of the extension. The clients wanted a garden design that would be something beautiful to look at from inside the house, reflective of the style of the new extension but also functional for a family with young children. The clients' requests included a level garden with only one step out from the kitchen, privacy and screening from neighbours, an area to sit and relax in the evening to enjoy the last of the evening sun, garden lighting, a water feature or interesting focal point from the kitchen, an easily-accessed garden shed softened by planting, boundary walls rendered and clad or covered by planting and the existing tree to be retained

Issues

When work began on the garden and the old existing garden fence was removed, it was discovered that there was a low garden wall behind it. The wall was cracked and falling down in places due to lack of a foundation and piers. This wall was subsequently demolished, a new foundation poured, and the wall was re-built with appropriate piers.

Two years after the garden's initial construction, the neighbour on the rear boundary cut away half of the large existing tree, significantly opening the view to the rear windows of the property. Reluctantly, the decision was made to redesign the bed along the rear of the garden. This involved the removal of the existing tree, the surrounding cedar seat and the roots of the tree. The new design for the rear bed was drawn up to include four new espalier *Elaeagnus x ebbingei* to provide high-level screening, a multi-stem birch tree, a large domed yew (*Taxus baccata*), new surrounding planting and a new water feature.

Fact File

Project: Urban family garden for contemporary outdoor living
Designer: Dean Lacey, MGLDA
Constructed by: LandArt (owned by Dean Lacey)

Location: Cabinteely, Dublin 18
Area: 65 m²

The Design Concept

The new kitchen extension has large floor to ceiling glass sliders which extend across the width of the extension, so the kitchen and living space has an uninterrupted view of the entire garden. When walking into the kitchen, the garden is on full show. The main concept for this garden design was to create a garden that was a 'living artwork'. In constant view from the kitchen, the structural framework for the large glass sliders would be the 'frame' of the painting. From sunrise to sunset and as the seasons change, so will the living painting.

As the garden footprint was reduced significantly due to the new extension, the garden design needed to work hard to achieve both a beautiful aesthetic from the house but also the functional uses required by the client. In this context, the choice of hard and soft landscaping materials was carefully considered to achieve the concept for the space.

View of garden before redevelopment.



THE DESIGN

Hard Landscaping

The Kilkenny limestone natural stone paving for this garden was selected to compliment the dark wood floors of the new kitchen. As the space is small, the same stone is used throughout but in various sized formats. The garden is accessed by stepping straight out on to a large Kilkenny limestone step that spans the entire width of the glass sliders, then stepping down onto the Kilkenny limestone patio. To achieve a contemporary look for the patio, the paving was laid in a grid pattern using 600 mm x 600 mm x 30 mm paving slabs with 5 mm joints. The stepping stones to the shed and the lawn borders are also Kilkenny limestone. Two thicknesses were



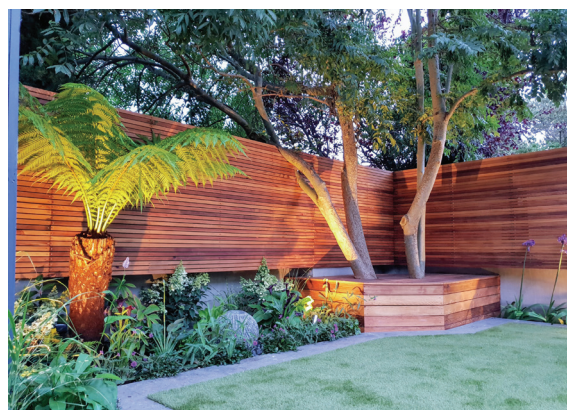
used: 600 mm x 100 mm and 600 mm x 300 mm. For the cladding on the walls, horizontal slatted cedar was chosen using 35 mm x 35 mm batons. To create the seat surrounding the existing tree, 90 mm x 18 mm cedar planks we're used. All the cedar used in the garden was oiled with two coats of Osmo satin clear oil, which penetrates deep to preserve the wood but also enhances its beautiful, warm brown colour. For the water feature, a black granite sphere was chosen to compliment the Kilkenny limestone. This was positioned within the border planting. As this family has young children, it was essential to keep adequate space for outdoor play and ensure its capacity for use throughout the year. A small garden space like this justifies the use of artificial lawn so that come rain, hail or shine the garden is never off limits. The patio protrudes into the lawn just enough to feel generous without compromising the overall balance. By keeping the levels of the lawn and patio flush with one another, this allows them to be treated as one continuous surface.

Soft Landscaping

There are three planted areas in this design. Along the west boundary of the garden is a hedge of the bamboo *Phyllostachys vivax*. The neighbouring garden on this side is 700 mm higher than the client's garden and screening was required but the client didn't want to use typical hedging plants such as laurel or photinia. The *Phyllostachys vivax* bamboo is a great alternative hedging plant. In this instance, it is cut and maintained at 2.1 metres high, like a hedge, and the bottom canes are stripped of the lower foliage to expose the beautiful, thick, yellow stems. By cutting the

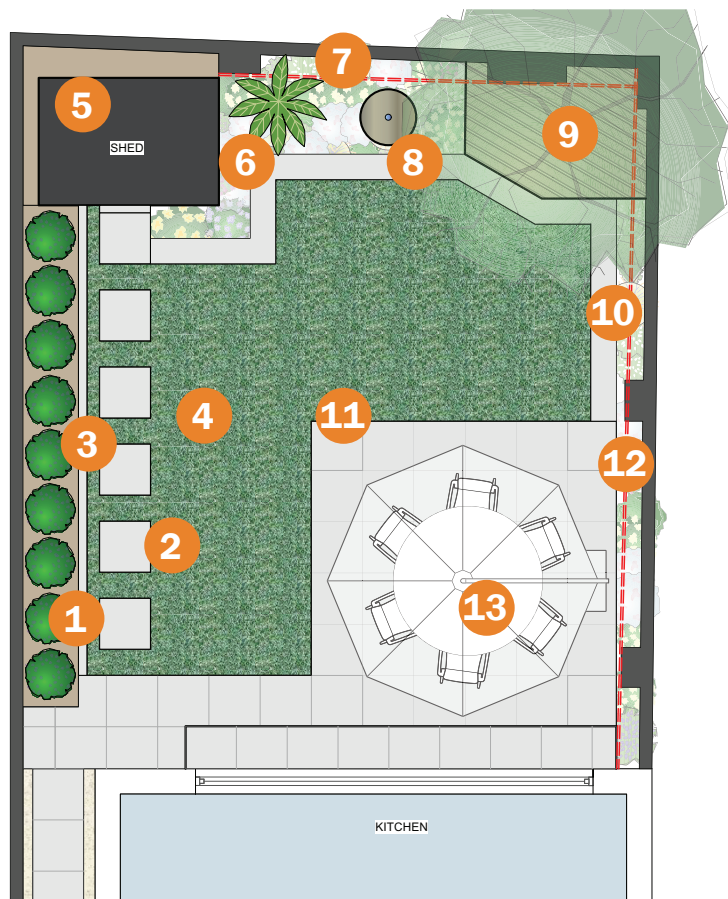


Top: View of the garden post construction
Above: A hedge of the bamboo *Phyllostachys vivax* provides boundary screening



The initial design for the rear boundary incorporating a seat constructed in cedar wood around the existing tree and mixed planting of grasses, perennials, hydrangeas and a feature tree fern. Garden lighting is subtly placed throughout the garden to extend evening enjoyment from indoors and create a magical outdoor space with theatrical shadows as night falls

SMALL SPACE SOLUTIONS



- 1** *Phyllostachys 'Vivax'* bamboo hedge
- 2** Kilkenny Limestone stepping stones
- 3** Border edging
- 4** Lawn
- 5** Shed relocated to here
- 6** Tree fern
- 7** Planting
- 8** Water feature
- 9** Cedar sealing around base of tree
- 10** Border edging
- 11** Kilkenny Limestone patio
- 12** Narrow bed planted with *Agapanthus*, *Allium* and tulip
- 13** Circular dining table and chairs

Revised plan drawing for rear garden boundary



- 1** New espallier *Eleagnus*
- 2** New planting
- 3** New water feature
- 4** New multistem birch trees
- 5** Tree fern in bulbous pot
- 6** New L-shaped, aluminium-framed outdoor sofa



View of garden post revision of landscaping along the rear garden boundary with new planting and a new water feature

bamboo like a hedge, it encourages dense growth in the middle which provides great privacy. The border to the rear of the garden was initially planted mainly with a mixture of ornamental grasses and perennials with a feature *Dicksonia antarctica* tree fern at just under one metre tall. Planting included *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus', *Carex oshimensis* 'Everest', *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight', *Salvia nemerosa* 'Caradonna', *Heuchera* 'Berry Timeless', *Ajuga reptans* 'Black Scallop', *Hosta* 'Halcyon', *Astillebe chinensis* 'Vision in Pink', *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'JS Caliente' and *Geranium* 'Dreamland'. In the third border, the narrowest of the three, *Agapanthus* 'Black Pantha' was planted en masse and interplanted with bulbs of *Allium* 'Gladiator' and *Tulipa* 'Double Sugar' during the next autumn.

Two years on, following the regrettable removal of the large tree to the rear of the garden and the replanting of the bed, new screening trees were added. Espalier plants of *Elaeagnus x ebbingei* were chosen as they are evergreen and provide all-year round screening. They are also fast growing and fill out quickly onto their framework. Plants trained as espaliers for screening have clear stems, usually up to 1.8m tall which allows space beneath their canopies for generous planting while providing an instant hedge effect at a higher level to screen views. The removal of the cedar bench seat also generated more space for planting in the redesign, so new planting of *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Pinky Winky', *Digitalis* 'Artic Fox Rose', *Hosta*, *Geum* 'Scarlet Tempest', *Allium* 'Gladiator', *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum' and *Helleborus argutifolius* 'Silver Lace' were added. ●

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