

How we did it...



PREPARING

WORK STARTS IN MAY 2015 with the old garden being stripped out. With all the windows at the back looking out onto the garden, and French doors leading outside from the sitting room, study and bedroom, designer Catherine could immediately see the potential.



MARKING

USING THE CURVED WALL near the back gate as a starting point, the curves of the borders are marked out to create a flowing space with three different seating areas. Catherine loved the old walls. "They make it an enclosed and snug private space," she says.



BUILDING

THE SINUOUS SHAPES of the borders are created from brick. Curved beds are soft on the eye, and can make a garden feel feminine. The white-painted render that follows gives a crisp, modern feel, and shows off the green ferns.



4
THE NEW GARDEN integrates with the house, making them work as one, and the continuously flowing curves at all levels make it feel bigger than it actually is.

1
THE WHITE RENDER is repeated throughout the new design, creating a smart backdrop to the greenery. Get the look with Bedec Barn Paint Semi Gloss, £29.99/2.5L toolstation.com

3
A MEXICAN BLUE PALM in a simple pot adds architectural interest to a blank wall.

2
THE STEPPING STONES through the bonded resin gravel (Harvest Sawn Sandstone, from £45/m², londonstone.co.uk) form a question mark, continuing the sculptural theme at ground level.

TIP Use different flooring textures to add visual impact and make it interesting to walk on

EXTREME Makeover

"We've mixed old with new"

Old walled boundaries have been combined with **MODERN CURVES** and finishes to create a stunning outdoor space



BEFORE

WITH A SQUARE OF LAWN, paving, decking and a shed, this was a serviceable garden with nothing standout about it.

OUR GARDEN PLAN

LOCATION

Blackheath, London.

THE LOOK

Modern, sculptural and flowing with exotic planting.

SITE & SOIL

Size 60m²

Faces West

Soil Sandy, but topped up with enriched topsoil suitable for ferns.

OUR BUDGET

Resin-bound gravel **£2,700**

Paving stone for the patio **£2,500**

Hardwood for the decking **£2,000**

Lights **£2,000**

Irrigation **£1,000**

Planting **£6,000**

TOTAL: £16,200

HOW LONG IT TOOK

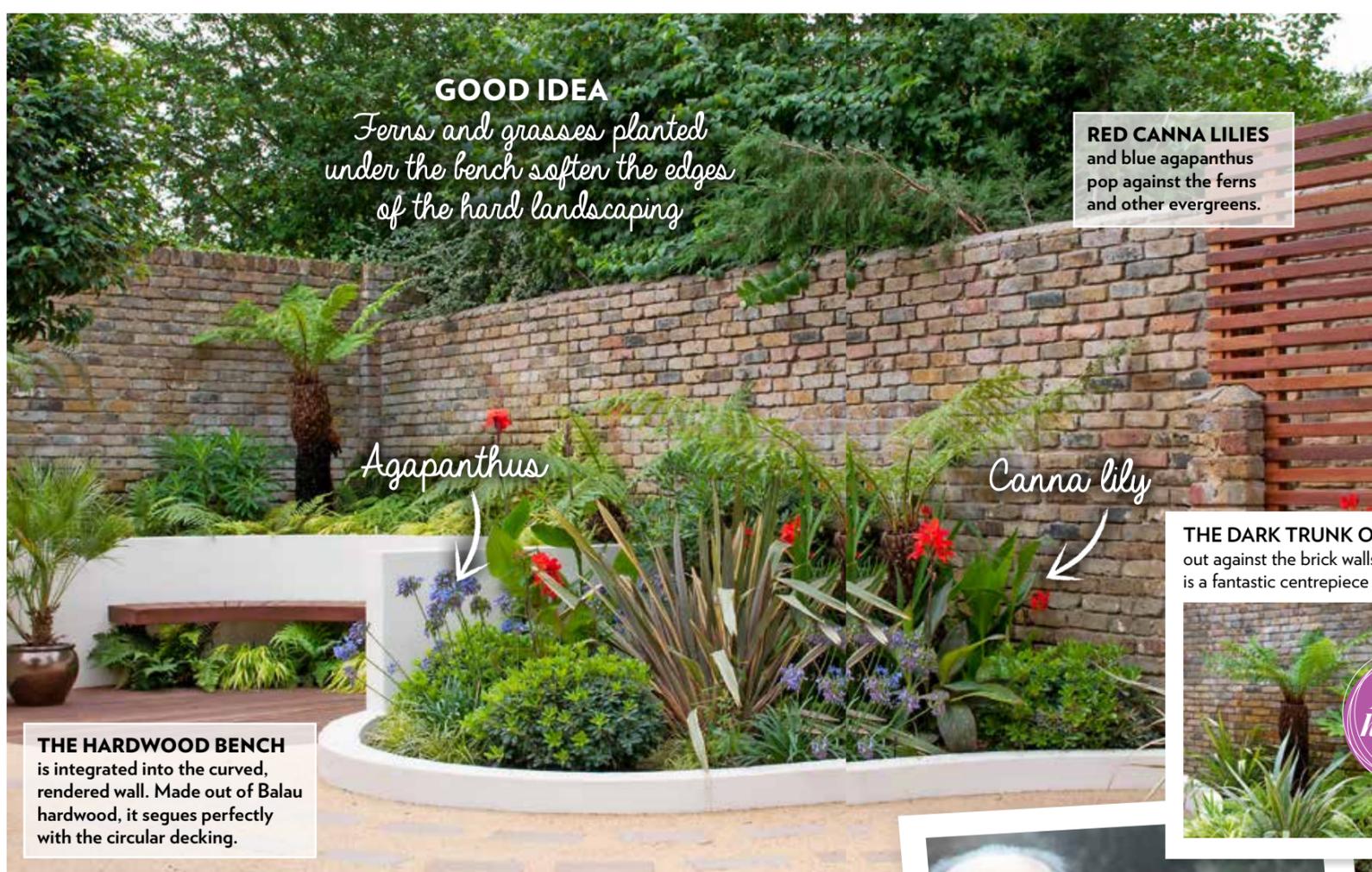
Clearing, setting out shapes, digging foundations **1 week**

Building walls **2 weeks**

Rendering/painting walls, building bench & trellis, laying decks, filling beds with soil **2 weeks**

Planting **1 day**

TOTAL: 5 WEEKS



GOOD IDEA

Ferns and grasses planted under the bench soften the edges of the hard landscaping

RED CANNA LILIES and blue agapanthus pop against the ferns and other evergreens.

THE HARDWOOD BENCH is integrated into the curved, rendered wall. Made out of Balau hardwood, it segues perfectly with the circular decking.

THE DARK TRUNK OF the soft tree fern (left) stands out against the brick walls, while the Portugal laurel (right) is a fantastic centrepiece to the whole courtyard.



Plant heaven

THE BLACK DINING TABLE and woven wicker chairs continue the minimalist theme in the dining area. The shape of the circular table is repeated in the deck beneath and in the curved wall. Breeze Dining Chairs, £700/2, Area Tables, £875, both skandium.com

THE URBIS SHELL BENCH in lightweight, white concrete with hand-turned legs of ash is sleek and sculptural and echoes the natural form of a seashell. **£1,965 urbisdesign.co.uk**

THE RENDERED BORDERS have been designed with a drainage outlet, so they don't become waterlogged – important for ferns and other exotic plants.

“Our peaceful garden improves our quality of life on a daily basis”

When Katie Oakley and her partner Michael Cahill moved into their detached, modern bungalow in 2014, they knew immediately that they wanted the garden to look very different. Conventionally laid out with a lawn, deck and shed and very little planting, it didn't fit with the modern look they were after. “We wanted a garden to suit the house, which was built in 1982,” explains Katie. “Our wish list included standout planting, such as palms and tree ferns, grasses and plants that were low-maintenance. And we wanted places to sit and entertain.”

The couple researched the kind of garden they were after on the Internet and in magazines. “Michael found garden designer Catherine Clancy (catherineclancy.com) and the examples of her work on her website were just what we wanted to achieve,” says Katie. “She was also local, which made it easier, and she knew relevant local suppliers.”

THE FIRST MEETING

Catherine, Katie and Michael discussed the gardens they liked that she had designed previously. “Catherine noted that many of the examples I chose had a sculptural feel to them, which reflects my love of sculpture,” says Katie.

Catherine had her likes and dislikes of the existing space. “It was a decent size for a courtyard garden, but it wasn't exciting, didn't make the best use of space or have much in the way of a seating area.

“The old garden walls were obscured with ivy and overgrown climbers, but a beautiful white wisteria was growing up the side of the house. It was the only plant we kept.”

CREATING THE PLAN

Catherine loved the old walls, and in particular the curved wall near the back gate. “They make it an enclosed and snug private space,” she says. “It was a pretty open brief. Katie wanted something special for her new home that reflected her love of sculpture. She'd prepared a presentation for our first meeting with lots of amazing ideas, which gave me a clear idea of the style she was after.

“She also wanted seating areas to follow the sun and shade with a dining area for evenings, a seat for afternoon shade and somewhere near the house for coffee in the morning sun. This garden is a little sun trap.”

Rather than putting actual sculptures in the garden, Catherine decided to make the whole space sculptural, incorporating functional items

such as the sinuous Urbis shell bench. Once her concept was complete, she created Sketchup 3D images. “3Ds are a fantastic visual aid and a great way to communicate ideas,” explains Catherine. “Katie immediately got the idea of the curved shape. We had a lot of discussions about materials and finally decided on the hardwood decking, the buff-coloured smooth sandstone and the complementary resin-bound gravel.”

Katie and Michael chose the most radical of the three designs presented by Catherine. “This design was a real surprise that inspired us,” says Katie. “We particularly liked the curves, the shaping, the different seating areas and the tree as a centre point. We loved her attention to detail. The question mark embedded in the bonded gravel is a lovely touch.”

BRINGING IT TO LIFE

As the garden took shape, Katie and Michael saw the plan coming to life. “We were quite involved and enjoyed selecting the materials and learning about the plants,” says Katie.

There were a few minor problems along the way. “I really wanted curved trellis above the walls, in the same material as the hardwood decking, so we had to work out a way to bend



Michael and Katie wanted a lush garden they could entertain in

the hardwood to the same profile as the curved wall,” explains Catherine. “We got the deck company to supply 7mm thick batons, which are thin enough to bend but strong enough not to split/warp when bent.

“I try to keep the number of different materials used in a garden to a maximum of three. The decking was used in the seating areas and repeated in the trellis, linking the whole garden together. The horizontal trellis follows the same curved flow as the rest of the garden and provides screening without blocking out any light.”

Splitting the garden into zones makes the space feel much bigger, and these areas are delineated by the flooring. “The stepping stones through the gravel lead you from one seating area to the other, and also to the back

gate,” explains Catherine. “The central gravel area pulls the whole garden together. The garden now flows, it's soft yet modern, it looks bigger than it is and it's beautiful and peaceful. Flowering plants pop up every season of the year, including daffodils, crocus and tulips in spring, purple and white alliums in summer, then red crocosmia and cannas. It even looks great in winter due to the evergreen ferns.”

THE END RESULT

“The planting is lush and cascades over the edge of beds and softens the walls,” says Katie. “We love the colours, the variety of shapes, the exotic nature of the plants and the contrast with the Portugal laurel, which was Michael's choice

and is at the centre of everything. We enjoy watching the different plants push through the earth, the leaves of the tree ferns unfold and the laurel come into flower.

“The visual impact is extremely important as we see the garden from the main rooms in the house. This means we can enjoy it all the time and feel like we are always in the garden.”

Katie now loves to sit in the shade, looking at it all. “Our new garden makes the indoors and outdoors work as one, which makes living here peaceful and interesting.

“To anyone planning something similar, I'd say be brave enough to choose the radical plan. Invest in the garden as it improves your quality of life on a daily basis.”