



Northern Soul

Designer Carolyn Grohmann turned this tricky townhouse site into a garden for all seasons

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Tucked behind one of the most elegant terraces in Edinburgh is a garden that has been designed to be inviting, regardless of time of day or season of the year. Its owners were clear that they wanted somewhere that would draw them outside all year round and at any hour. “Late at night they like to switch on the garden lights and sit around the lily bowl,” says designer Carolyn Grohmann who was commissioned to turn this awkwardly shaped space into a proper garden with year-round colour and space for vegetables to grow.

The garden is long and narrow and it sits at a sharp angle to the house, finishing in a point at the far end. This, however, was less of a problem than the rubble that had accumulated while the house was being renovated and the fact that neighbouring householders had planted the edges of the narrow lane – which provides the only access to the garden – with a profusion of flowers.

“We did finally manage to manoeuvre a mini digger onto the site without mishap,” she says. Rather than attempt to disguise the boundaries, Carolyn based her design on a sectional slice of a flower, with petal-shaped beds radiating from the terrace. On the terrace she placed a large lily bowl, its surface a perfect reflecting mirror, its exterior rusted

to a warm shade of ochre, and she surrounded it with a low wall topped with scorched oak to create a curved seating area.

Deeper into the garden, raised beds were made from woven rebar, the reinforcing rods used in construction and road building. With its resemblance to willow, woven rebar gives the appearance of a natural material but has the advantage of longevity. "Raised beds need to be big enough not to dry out quickly, so here they are substantial and packed with plants, which helps to keep down weeds and reduces evaporation from the soil surface," says Carolyn.

The planting is gloriously romantic, a heady palette of perennials such as *Primula japonica* 'Apple Blossom' and the peony 'Claire de Lune', interspersed with grasses including *Stipa tenuissima* and *Carex elata* 'Aurea', above which fine-leaved *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki', *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* and other small trees of delicate habit cast only a tracery of shade.

Growing plants in substantial beds creates useful height; when the rush of new growth gets going in spring, the garden quickly disappears behind a lacy screen of flower and foliage, making a trip to the beehive-shaped compost bins at the far end of the garden feel like a journey of discovery.

These bins and the exterior door that leads to

Right Rather than resisting them, Carolyn employed the textures and colours of the Edinburgh brick walls surrounding the garden, and arrived at a finely tuned, cohesive space.

Far right Circular design elements soften the angles in the garden.

Below right The autumn leaves of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* smell of burnt sugar as they fall.

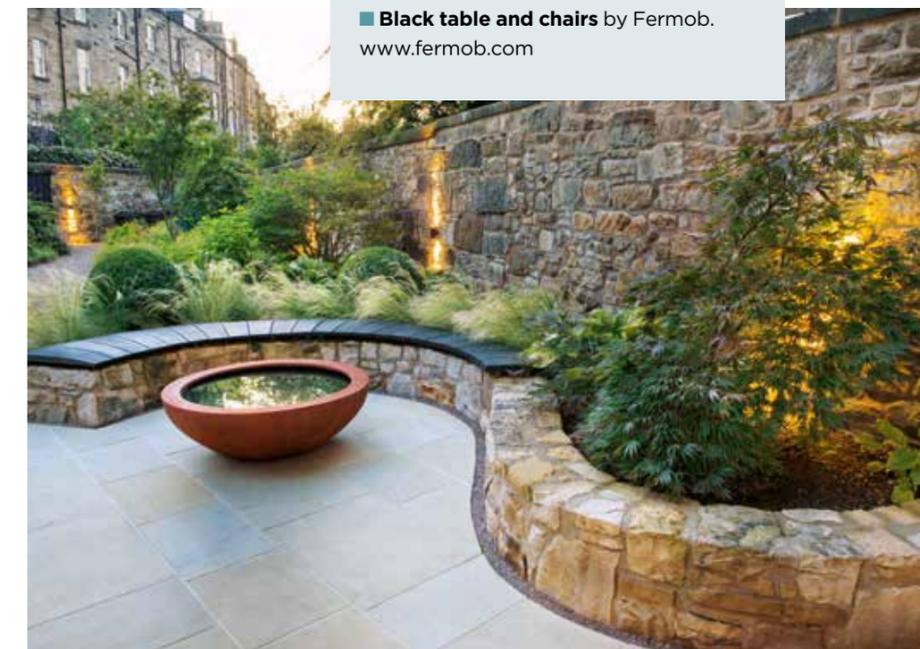
Below Generously proportioned raised beds contain perennials, a mini-meadow of wildflowers and handsome kale 'Cavolo Nero' plants



the lane have been painted black to tone with the scorched oak. The garden furniture, from Fermob, is also black, which brings some cohesion to the design.

When she surveyed the garden, Carolyn was struck by the beauty of the high walls that surround it, so she had these repointed, recessing the sand-coloured mortar so that each stone block stands slightly proud. "In Scotland, because of the long hours of summer daylight, garden lighting isn't always essential but here I've used subtle up-lighters to bring out the beauty of the walls."

This is another reason why she hasn't also smothered the walls in climbers, preferring instead to use them as a decorative foil for well-spaced trees and shrubs. The end result is a delicate balance between contemporary design and traditional garden elements that looks good in every season and in all weathers. It has, in all ways, achieved a sense of harmony. Carolyn says: "The clients love the garden and relish spending time in it but they also appreciate the fact that, despite the complexities of access, we managed to keep all of their neighbours happy."



FACT FILE

- **Designer** Carolyn Grohmann, Secret Gardens. Tel: 07796 457537; www.secretgardensdesign.co.uk;
- **Garden** built by design and build company Water Gems. Tel: 01313 17 8585; www.waterglass.co.uk
- **Plants** supplied by Binny Plants. Tel: 01506 858931; www.binnyplants.com
- **Scorched oak bench** by cabinet maker Michaela Huber. Tel: 01316 609534; www.michaela-huber.co.uk
- **Lily Bowl water feature** from Urbis, outdoor accessory designers. Tel: 01759 373839; www.urbisdesign.co.uk
- **Garden lighting** by Mark Dunion Outdoor Electrical. Tel: 07973 343844; www.mgdelectrical.co.uk
- **Stonemasonry** by Jorge de Sousa. Tel: 07529 344520; <http://jbggraphics.wix.com/jorgesite>
- **Sandstone slabs and Cedec** by CED. Tel: 01708 867237; www.ced.ltd.uk
- **Beehive compost bins** supplied by Cheshire Wood. Tel: 01829 741437; www.cheshirewood.co.uk
- **Black table and chairs** by Fermob. www.fermob.com

Design Details

Woven rebar

The raised beds are made from rebar – the reinforcing rods used by the construction industry – that has been woven to resemble willow. “Aside from how it looks, the advantages of using rebar is that it has a very narrow profile and can be used around mature trees without disturbing their roots. It can be shaped into any form and in the eight years that I’ve been using it I’ve yet to see it change colour or degrade in any way,” Carolyn says.

Surfaces

“The sawn sandstone on the terrace was chosen to match the polished limestone of the interior floor surface,” says Carolyn. “I chose to use pink Cedec gravel for the paths because it tones in with Edinburgh sandstone.”

Scorched oak

The bench is formed from oak heartwood that has been scorched to create an all-weather surface that doesn’t leach tannins onto the patio. “The scorching also gives it a very deep hue and makes it extremely tactile,” adds Carolyn.

Design framework

The garden has been shaped like a petal, a motif which can be seen from the upstairs windows. It skews away from the house at an angle but Carolyn aligned the patio with the back of the house. A multi-stemmed *Cercidiphyllum* fills the sharp corner at the far end of the garden, where surrounding walls help concentrate its autumn fragrance.



Above Woven rebar gives the raised beds the look of willow but will last for years.

Below right A scorched oak seat on top of a low, sinuous wall creates a stylish seating area next to the house.

Below left A central lily bowl is a perfect focal point on the terrace.

Planting

The planting is lush and begins with spring bulbs. Grasses add year-round interest. The box balls are extra-large and make a foil for the frothiness of the flowers and foliage. Flowers come in succession, and some, such as *Geranium* ‘Rozanne’ will keep going right through to November.

Shed

“We could have gone for something contemporary but the client specified a ‘man cave’, so I designed a traditional shed made from Scottish larch and cedar shingles. I specified that it should be extra-high because my client is very tall,” says Carolyn.

Trees

The trees, which include *Malus* ‘Evereste’ and *Amelanchier* ‘Robin Hill’, have been chosen to give year-round interest, either with blossom, fruit or autumn colour. All are suitable for a small garden. ■

