

At this time of year, colour in the garden comes from soft pink foxgloves and the yellow-orange rose Lady Emma Hamilton.



STEPPING UP

Bespoke design solutions took a small London terrace garden to the next level

WORDS JODIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHY MARIANNE MAJERUS

Outdoor space is such a luxury in London that when Alice and Laurence Tailby first moved to their Victorian terraced house

in Hampstead they didn't initially register the limitations of the garden. 'I was just excited to have somewhere to put a barbecue,' says Laurence.

It was only when the first garden designer they contacted declared the project beyond her technical abilities that they became aware of just how difficult the site was. Fortunately, the second designer they spoke to was made of sterner stuff. 'I like a challenge,' says Sara Jane Rothwell. 'Although this was definitely one of the most awkward sites I've ever worked on.'

Not only was the garden small and predominantly set at a tricky 45-degree angle to the house, but a semi-subterranean garage filled the end of the plot. When the Tailbys moved in, this structure had been encased in slabs to make a sort of raised terrace where Laurence installed his barbecue. 'It looked a bit like a concrete Nissen hut, flanked by 15 stone steps and a path leading down to the rear street where you access the garage,' says Sara Jane.

'The whole site was a disaster. There was hardcore everywhere and the new bifold doors hung 30cm above the footings of the old conservatory,' she says. 'However, I've designed a lot of roof terraces and I treated this in much the same way. Once we agreed that the planting could be in raised beds, it gave me freedom to bank the ground up around the garage,

sculpting the levels to help it disappear.' Like with a roof terrace, the first step was to get a structural engineer in to check the garage was strong enough to support a terrace. 'We then removed all the paving and waterproofed the structure,' says Sara Jane.

Following sound design principles, she has turned the garden's 45-degree skew to advantage, laying a deck across the back of the house where the view takes in the widest part of the garden and relocating the path to zigzag across the plot towards the rear terrace. But the real master stroke in the design was Sara Jane's brave decision to build the garden up even higher than the garage roof, so that instead of being an exposed plinth it becomes an intimate terrace enclosed on all sides by plants.

Rows of low yew hedging now emphasise the strong geometry of the finished garden, retaining an exuberant mass of herbaceous perennials that create an ever-changing picture throughout the year. 'Alice is very keen on her plants and wanted to get lots of colour into the beds,' says Sara Jane. Froths of lime green *Euphorbia x martini* Tiny Tim and *Alchemilla mollis* soften the edges of paving and decking, while the blush pink from lofty spires of *Digitalis purpurea* 'Sutton's Apricot' and climbing rose The Generous Gardener contrasts beautifully with the grey fencing. There are even apple trees: one variety for eating and another for cooking – proof that good design and the skills of a talented designer will always bear fruit, even in the most challenging of outdoor spaces. 🍷

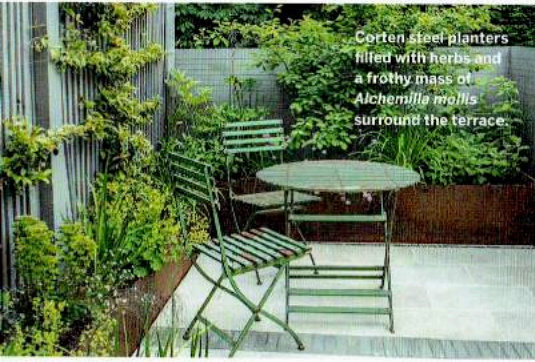
GARDEN GUIDE

ORIENTATION The garden faces southeast.

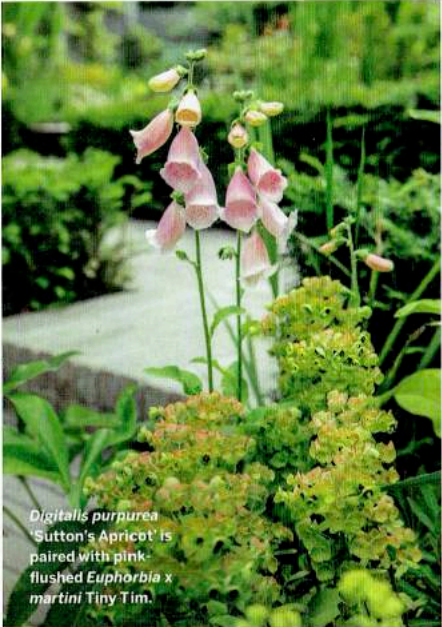
SOIL TYPE Wholly imported top soil.

SPECIAL FEATURES Exceptionally difficult site that is set at a 45-degree angle to the house with a semi-subterranean garage structure at the rear.

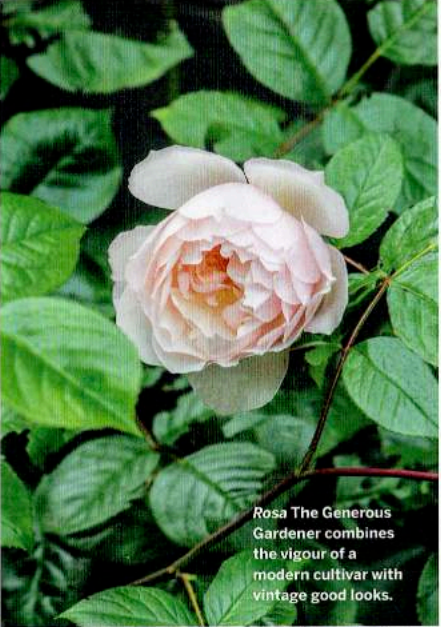
GARDEN DESIGN by Sara Jane Rothwell of London Garden Designer, 020 8348 9514, londongardendesigner.com.



Corten steel planters filled with herbs and a frothy mass of *Alchemilla mollis* surround the terrace.



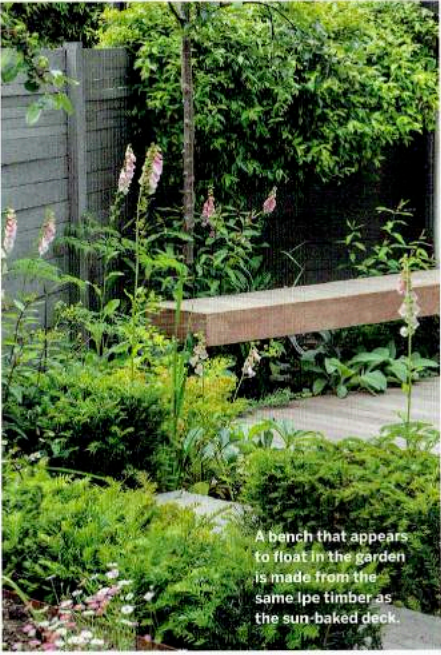
Digitalis purpurea 'Sutton's Apricot' is paired with pink-flushed *Euphorbia x martini* Tiny Tim.



Rosa The Generous Gardener combines the vigour of a modern cultivar with vintage good looks.



Culinary herbs, including sage and pink-flowered chives, are planted close to the barbecue.



A bench that appears to float in the garden is made from the same lpe timber as the sun-baked deck.