



ELEVATED THINKING

When Sara Jane Rothwell was invited to rework a garden with stunning views, she used her talent to take it to another level

WORDS JODIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHY MARIANNE MAJERUS

The dining terrace behind the house was resurfaced with pale stone slabs and Ipe wood decking to provide a visual link with the water feature on the new deck at the far end of the garden

Having a change of level in your garden can be a good thing, breaking up the space and adding a certain dynamism. But you can have too much of a good thing. Garden designer Sara Jane Rothwell has made dealing with awkward topography a speciality of hers, but even she was slightly taken aback on her first visit to this north London plot.

'In most respects it was a standard city garden and actually a good size for the capital, but towards the end boundary it just shot away downhill,' says Sara Jane. In fact, her clients' children used to sledge down the slope in winter when they were small. But those children are now away at university and the clients decided to improve, rather than move away from, their much-loved family home.

'The house had a new conservatory and an amazing window the full height of the house, giving stunning views over the garden and the city beyond,' says Sara Jane. 'Outside, there was a good-size dining terrace and lots of lawn, but the clients wanted more flowers and an extra seating area at the sloping end.'

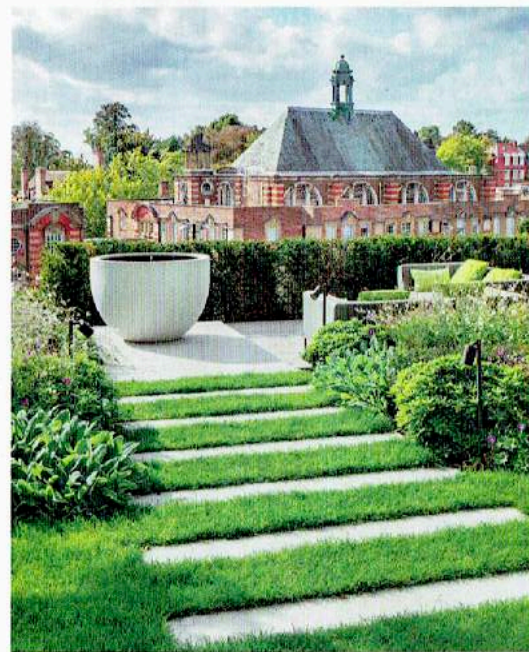
Sara Jane's master stroke was to come up with the concept of a cantilevered platform over the slope, creating a level area where they could enjoy the view. This was finished in smart pale Ipe wood decking, with space for a barbecue, some temptingly squashy sofas and a low coffee table, all framed by a yew hedge to conceal the slope underneath, which is now covered in wildflower turf. 'The entire footprint of the deck is gained space,' says Sara Jane. 'And we kept the old steps down on one side, so the clients could access a garden shed tucked away out of sight at the very bottom of the garden.'

The clients had also asked for the sound of moving water, so the new deck was an ideal place to put a recirculating water bowl, aligned with the house. To link the garden and house, visually and physically, Sara Jane set 2m-wide stepping stones into the lawn to lead back to the broad, shallow steps that go down

onto the dining terrace by the house. Here, the same Ipe wood decking used on the new platform is set between pale-grey sandstone slabs, while a large planter of elegant *Amelanchier lamarckii* beside the house blurs the line between inside and out.

'The clients love their view over the beautiful neighbouring roofs,' says Sara Jane, 'so I was asked to keep the planting low.' In practice, this meant that Sara had to restrict her plant palette to those cultivars that reach no more than 70cm in height. 'It was no great hardship,' she says. 'They wanted a planting scheme to evoke the English country house gardens they love to visit, in a palette of soft mauves, pinks and greys, so we went with masses of *Agastache* 'Blackadder', *Geranium Rozanne*, ornamental grasses and frothy *Erigeron karvinskianus* (Mexican fleabane). The overall effect is calm, elegant and highly conducive to entertaining.'

These days, when the children come home to visit, they are still drawn to the end of the garden, but now it is for civilised socialising, not sledging. 🍷



(This picture) Large urns from the French pottery Terre d'Albines sit beyond purple spires of *Agastache* 'Blackadder'

(Left) A stepping-stone path draws the eye to the new deck, elevated above a steep and unusable slope



GARDEN GUIDE

ORIENTATION

South-west facing.

SOIL TYPE Loam soil, improved with mulch.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Cantilevered deck at the rear of the garden to take advantage of the exceptional city views.

GARDEN DESIGN

Sara Jane Rothwell,
020 8348 9514,
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(Clockwise, from top left)
Erigeron karvinskianus
'Profusion' (Mexican fleabane);
Deschampsia cespitosa
'Goldtau'; pleached cotoneaster
forms a screen along a
boundary fence; *Gaura*
lindheimeri 'Whirling
Butterflies'; *Geranium*
Rozanne; *Centranthus*
ruber 'Albus' (white valerian);
low yew hedges conceal
the retaining wall that
divides the dining terrace
from the rest of the garden