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Design for living

With an expert eye for colour and form, textile designer Neisha Crosland has created an eclectic garden out of a space once occupied by several south London houses

WORDS JOJO TULLOH PHOTOGRAPHS RACHEL WARNE

On a nondescript street in south London, behind the high walls of an old carriage works, is a series of interlocking outdoor rooms that form the heart of the home in which textile designer Neisha Crosland lives and works.

Here the division between inside and out is highly fluid, painted patio doors fold back to open a flagstone-floored garden room to the elements. In the sitting room an oval window frames the six clipped holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) in the small lawn. Glass and metal doors lead into the garden from every ground-floor room. At night the garden is lit up by scores of candles and lanterns.

We enter the garden through the light-filled garden room with its round, marble table covered in beautiful sandstone vessels and small ceramic sculptures. Some

are empty, others filled with dark-leaved bromeliads and glossy leaved *Stephanotis floribunda*; the room's mix of trailing plants and exquisite ceramics is reminiscent of the French interior designer Madeleine Castaing, one of Neisha's inspirations.

Large, paved slabs further blur the boundary between inside and out and lead on to reclaimed Yorkstone setts, that garden designer Sean Walter calls 'great loaves of stone'. These form fat, stone cushions for the nine bespoke, square planters in galvanised steel, which are planted up in succession, first with tulips (*T. 'Black Parrot'* or *T. 'Queen of Night'*) then alliums (*A. hollandicum 'Purple Sensation'*) and finally with herbs, peppers and tomatoes.

In this garden, full use is made of vertical as well as horizontal space. On the walls a ▶

KEY ELEMENTS

What A series of small interlocking spaces, filled with beautiful objects, hidden behind high walls.

Where South London.

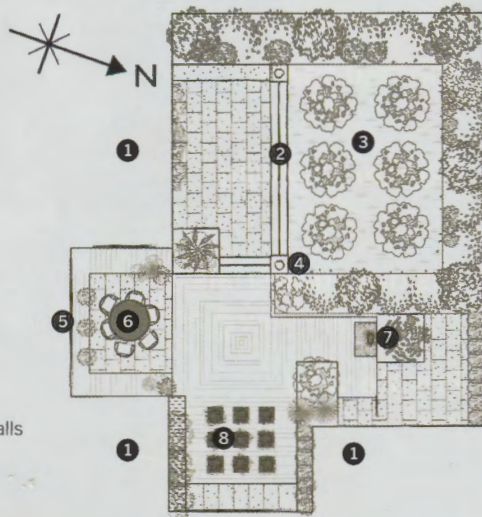
Size 20m x 20m (approx).

Soil Bought in top soil.

Special features Lawn with avenue of holm oaks, water feature.

Designed by Sean Walter
(theplantspecialist.co.uk).

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1 House | 5 Box hedging balls |
| 2 Steps to lawn | 6 Table |
| 3 Lawn | 7 Water feature |
| 4 Square edging | 8 Planters |



Neisha, with the help of designer Sean Walter, has cleverly linked the different areas of the garden by using the same reclaimed Yorkstone setts and repeat plantings of box hedge and olive trees.



Turn your head and there is a distinctly Parisian air of chic to the vine dripping from wrought iron balconies and the miniature avenue of holm oaks

▷ well-grown vine (*Vitis coignetiae*), snakes from one side of the house to the other, covering garden balconies and walls before reappearing through a small hole to be trained along horizontal wires. It works as a kind of living wallpaper. At waist height more pots (collected over many years) filled with ferns, sedums and oxalis sit on the marble topped cupboards that hide electricity and water meters. Outside the kitchen window, just a few steps from the cooker, is a vast, circular table, cast in rough concrete aggregate by artist Rachel Schwalm, at which many of the family meals are eaten. The dining area feels like a natural extension of the kitchen rather than a separate outside space.

At the corner of the house an olive tree, clipped unorthodoxly for a straggly

see-through look, (reminiscent of one of Neisha's nature-inspired wallpapers). On the other side of the steps is a square bed, edged with box containing deep-purple irises and the small, multi-stemmed tree *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy'. Beneath the buttressed-brick walls, topped with pots holding *Agave americana*, are two long borders dotted with box balls and annuals. Watering is a problem in this garden. The beds can get very dry, and while automatic watering favours annuals it can cause problems with blight for the many box plants dotted throughout the garden. The number of annuals planted varies from year to year. This year *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' blazes out in several beds but in previous years the beds have been sown with night-scented ▷



Nine square galvanised steel containers are planted successionaly starting with tulips and alliums and later contain chilli peppers, tomatoes and herbs.



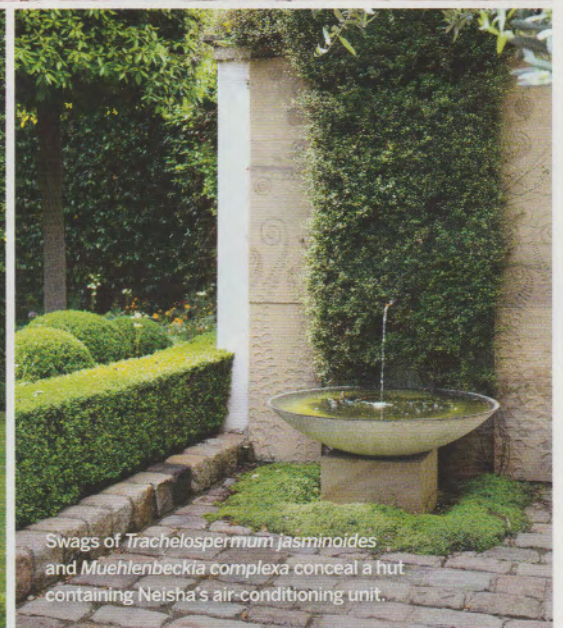
Carefully pruned trees, including the purple-leaved *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy', make the garden feel deceptively large.



Plump box balls beneath the kitchen window echo square box hedging around an olive tree.



The mini avenue of clipped holm oaks recalls a Parisian park and provides the perfect setting for games of pétanque.



Swags of *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Muehlenbeckia complexa* conceal a hut containing Neisha's air-conditioning unit.

Beauty entwined is a good way of describing this highly original garden, it is a triumphant mixture of influences

▷ *Nicotiana* and the small, red, Mexican sunflower, *Tithonia rotundifolia*. “I just love orange more and more,” says Sean, “it goes so well with green.” Neisha is very much involved with this garden’s day-to-day health (with the help of maintenance company Planet Turf). She lets out a cry of anguish when she spots some box blight and bemoans the lack of time she has for weeding.

As we leave I look into Neisha’s studio and notice a design for one of her new nature-inspired wallpapers. This one, called ‘Blackberry’, has twists of leaves and fat berries entwined. Beauty entwined is a good way of describing this highly original garden, it is a triumphant mixture of influences; olive trees and trailing rosemary evoke Provence, while a series of small joined spaces and tassels hanging from a

door handle suggest Morocco. Turn your head and there is a distinctly Parisian air of chic to the vine dripping from wrought iron balconies and the miniature avenue of holm oaks, under which pétanque and croquet are played. Look through into the sitting room and the luxurious fabrics, wide-brimmed lamps and gold-painted wall panels give a hint of old Hollywood glamour. Neisha Crosland’s work may keep her extremely busy but this garden reveals an equal capacity for the good things in life. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

To find out more about how Neisha’s garden informs her work as a designer of textiles, ceramics and wallpapers visit Neisha’s website at neishacrosland.com



Geum 'Totally Tangerine' and the dark-purple *Iris* 'Black Swan' leap out against the bright green box foliage. The toy car belonged to Neisha's now teenage sons when small.



TURNING THE OUTSIDE IN

Borrow some of Neisha's ideas for linking house and garden to create a sense of space

Don't be afraid of using colour in the garden. Neisha's window frames (1) are painted emerald green, providing contrast to the yellow greens of the ferns and vine leaves.

Blur the boundaries between garden and house. In Neisha's garden room (2) flagstone flooring helps to link the room to the outside terrace, while the floral pattern on the wall echoes the vine clambering across the outside walls. Plants, in sandstone pots from Robert Kime (robertkime.com), and an ammonite-like sculptural pot by ceramicist Matthew Chambers (matthewchambers.co.uk) on top of the marble table add to the natural theme.

Locate an eating area near the house to make it feel more like an extension of the house. By placing a table (3) on the terrace close to the kitchen, Neisha has ensured that many summer meals are eaten here. The Ron Arad chairs, from Habitat, would also work in an interior setting but Neisha has treated their legs to give a corroded look that fits with the industrial finish of the concrete table.

Be imaginative with garden furnishings to give your outside spaces a more individual style that will reflect the décor of your home. This antique mirror (4) not only helps to create an illusion of space it also reflects the luxuriance of Neisha's interiors. Neisha sources many of her garden's covetable objects, including lanterns, benches and stone vases from flea markets and antique shops, such as Core One Antiques (coreoneantiques.com) in Chelsea.

Use windows to frame an outside space. This oval window (5) turns the view of the lawn, with its clipped holm oaks, into a living picture. The walls are painted with cherry blossom on a gold background, which once again brings garden and interior closer together.

Decorate garden walls with colours and patterns that echo interior walls. To cover the hut that contains the house's air-conditioning unit, Neisha has used granite panels (6) on to which the artist Paul Clifford has shot-blasted the fern pattern of one of her wallpaper designs. The panels, which were originally commissioned for her Chelsea Green shop, work beautifully with the maidenhair vine (*Muehlenbeckia complexa*).

