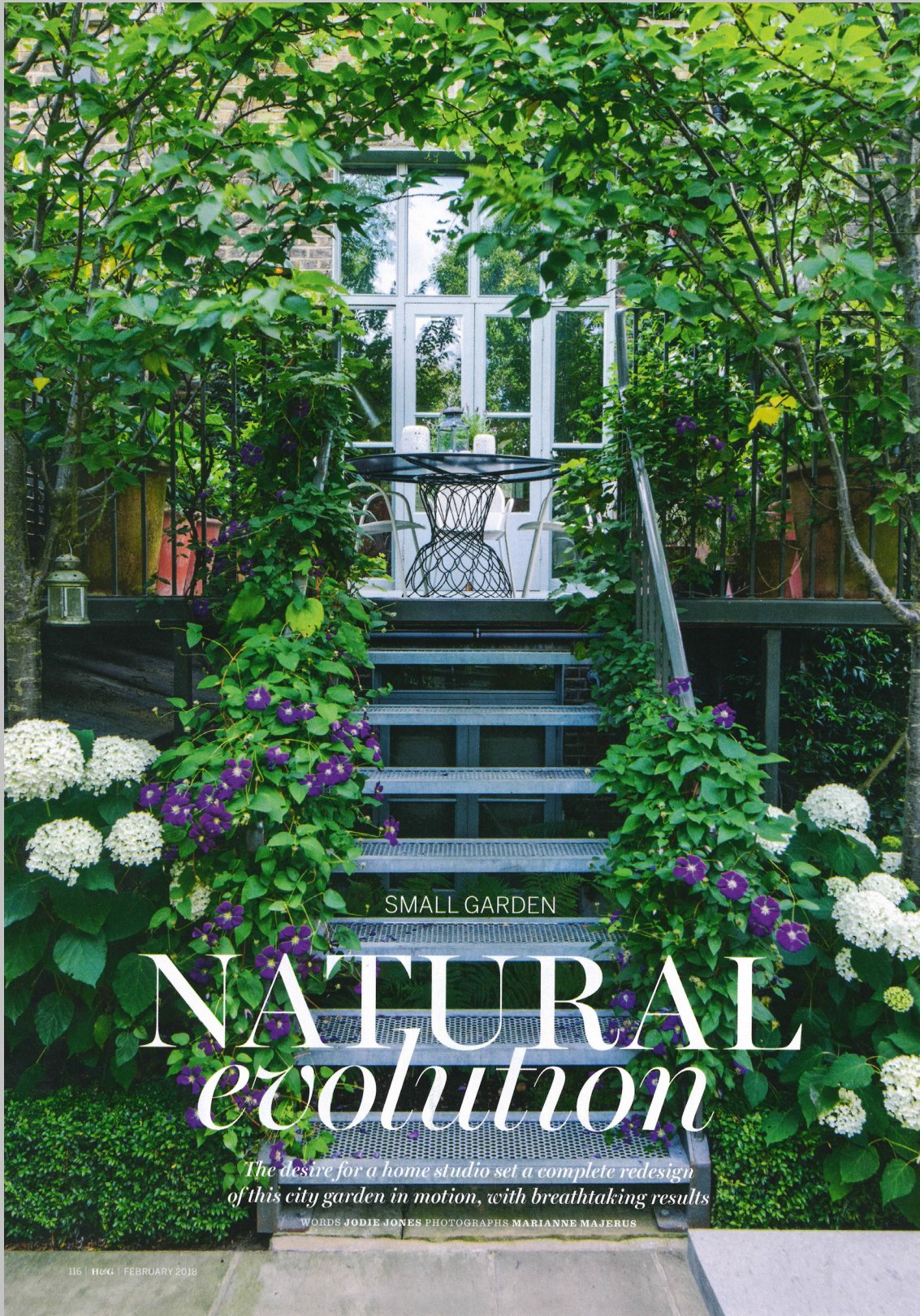


HOMES & GARDENS®



SMALL GARDEN

NATURAL *evolution*

*The desire for a home studio set a complete redesign
of this city garden in motion, with breathtaking results*

WORDS JODIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS



OPPOSITE PAGE The French windows of the first-floor sitting room open on to a balcony, with steps leading down to the dining terrace. Framing the scene is a pair of *Prunus* 'Umineko', which are laden with white cherry blossom in spring, and the shade-tolerant *Clematis* 'Etoile Violette'.

THIS PAGE The stone-topped table, which was the brainchild of garden designer Sean Walter, is thrown into relief by the surrounding planting, which includes homeowner Charlotte Grosland's favourite *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle'.





Soaring business rates are not often a creative stimulus, but when the rent for interior designer Charlotte Crosland's office doubled, it was just the trigger she needed to build a studio in her west London garden. 'We have lived in this house for almost twenty years,' she says, 'and the far end of the garden was always a problem. Shady and dried out by the roots of a large oak tree, it was impossible to keep a lawn healthy there.' The decision to build a studio turned the issue into an amazing opportunity.

To mastermind the transformation, Charlotte called in architect Alex Greenway and garden designer Sean Walter. 'I wanted the studio to be as large as possible,' says Charlotte, 'with a classic-contemporary look to complement the house. Although interiors are my thing, there were elements I wanted as part of the redesign – such as a pair of benches, a cobbled path and no more than one step down from the studio to the garden – and I knew I would need Sean's help to get them right.'

It was Charlotte's desire for that single step down that was to have the greatest impact on the garden, as the studio needed to be built without damaging the roots of the dominant oak. 'That area of the garden had to be banked up into a platform with a retaining wall to create a level surface on which we could build the studio,' she says.

The existing stone-flagged dining terrace in the middle of the garden survived the building phase, but the side furthest from the house was now edged by a wall, with no means of

OPPOSITE PAGE The garden has an elegant cohesion that unites Charlotte's new studio (top) at the far end with the existing space. In the centre, an impressive multi-stemmed *Osmanthus x fortunei* rises up out of a green sea of *Hakonechloa macra*.

ABOVE The purple flowers of *Agapanthus africanus* add a softening touch and splash of colour to the formal front garden. **RIGHT** Stone steps, enhanced by decorative features such as a lantern and box balls, lead the way to Charlotte's studio.





getting up to the studio. Sean's solution was to insert two flights of stone steps, one at either end. One set aligns with the path from the house and is now Charlotte's enviable commuter route to work. The other lines up with the side gate and has become a passage for clients and tradespeople.

The effect of the steps left Sean with an empty central area on the platform outside the studio, which he has filled with a bed of low grass *Hakonechloa macra* and a fine specimen of *Osmanthus x fortunei*. Studded with fragrant white flowers in autumn, underplanted with orange *Tulipa 'Ballerina'* in spring and silhouetted by uplighters after dark, the tree makes for a stunning sculptural centrepiece.

Multi-stemmed *Amelanchier lamarckii* were added to each corner of the studio garden, while the little remaining space has been filled with *Rosa Iceberg*, white *Anemone x hybrida 'Honorine Jobert'*, blousy *Hydrangea arborescens 'Annabelle'* and box balls for structure. A pair of Charlotte's benches face each other across the space and complete a picture of studied perfection. 'I can't fault the garden,' she says. 'It's so uplifting that it has transformed my own design work. It is simple and tranquil, a total joy all year round.'

ABOVE At each corner of the upper studio garden, a multi-stemmed *Amelanchier lamarckii* is underplanted with a green tapestry of clipped box and low-growing *Epimedium x youngianum 'Niveum'*.

ABOVE RIGHT On the shady dining terrace, the beds are edged with box and velvety mind-your-own-business.

RIGHT Pots of *Hosta 'Francee'* create a pleasing ensemble.

GARDEN GUIDE

Orientation West facing.

Soil type Heavy loam/clay, extensively improved.

Special features Combines a family garden with a home studio.

Garden design Sean Walter, The Plant Specialist, 01494 866650, theplantspecialist.co.uk.

