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CLEAN CONNECTIONS

Miria Harris has created a city garden for a young family that helps forge a link between a Victorian villa and its contemporary architectural additions

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IN BRIEF

What Private family garden.

Where London.

Soil London clay, improved with peat-free compost.

Size 280 square metres, rear garden; 80 square metres front garden.

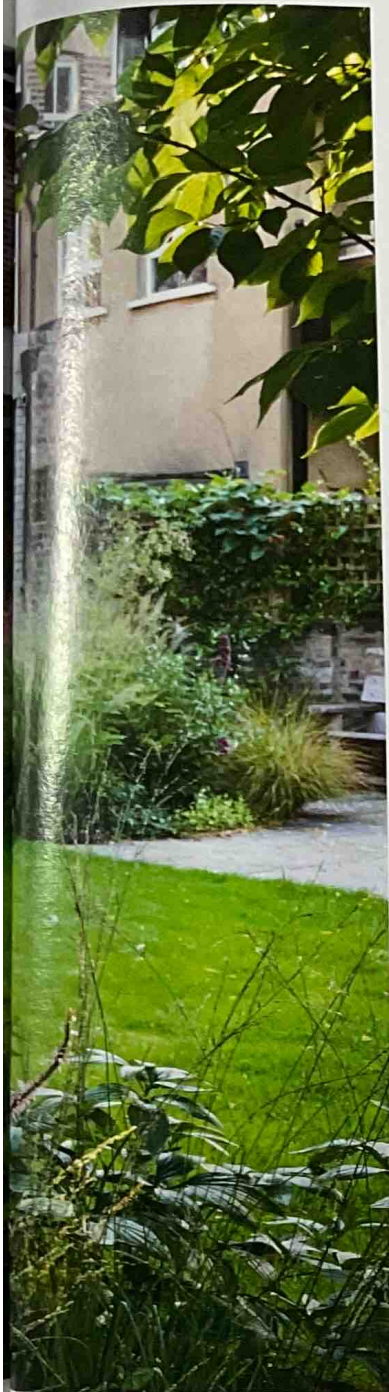
Climate Temperate. North-facing rear garden.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

A pleasing house with a well-proportioned garden is a promising start for any garden designer. While many city gardens are long, narrow strips, this one – sitting behind a double-fronted Victorian villa in east London – is a broad rectangle, overlooked by the three back rooms. Its new owners, a couple with young children, appreciated garden designer Miria Harris's flexible approach – and the fact she was willing to listen and ask questions – and requested a garden that was full of action, but didn't feel too manicured.

Miria was excited to be brought in early on, alongside architects Built Works, and interior designer, Morrisstudio. "Garden designers often come on board once a house is finished, so it was great to be part of a close collaboration like this, to be able to consider the project as a whole."

The architect had given the mid-Victorian house a series of bold, contemporary additions and Miria saw the garden as sitting between the old and the new: "I wanted it to have a conversation with the clean lines of the new architecture and the proportions of the original house." The spare, rectilinear plan of the garden references the new elements. "I felt that introducing curves would make this garden



seem too fussy," she says, while the garden's three new boundary walls, all in mellow reclaimed brick, manage to look as though they have always been here.

As the main hard landscaping material, the York-stone paving was carefully selected to fulfil many functions, both aesthetic and practical. "The owners share my passion for sustainability, so UK stone felt the right choice," explains Miria. The irregularly sized slabs are a nod to the differently sized window panes and Crittall doors at the back of the house, suggesting age, as does the stone's riven finish. Meanwhile, the stone's pale buff tone fuses with both the new brick of the extensions and the mortar of the house's original brickwork.

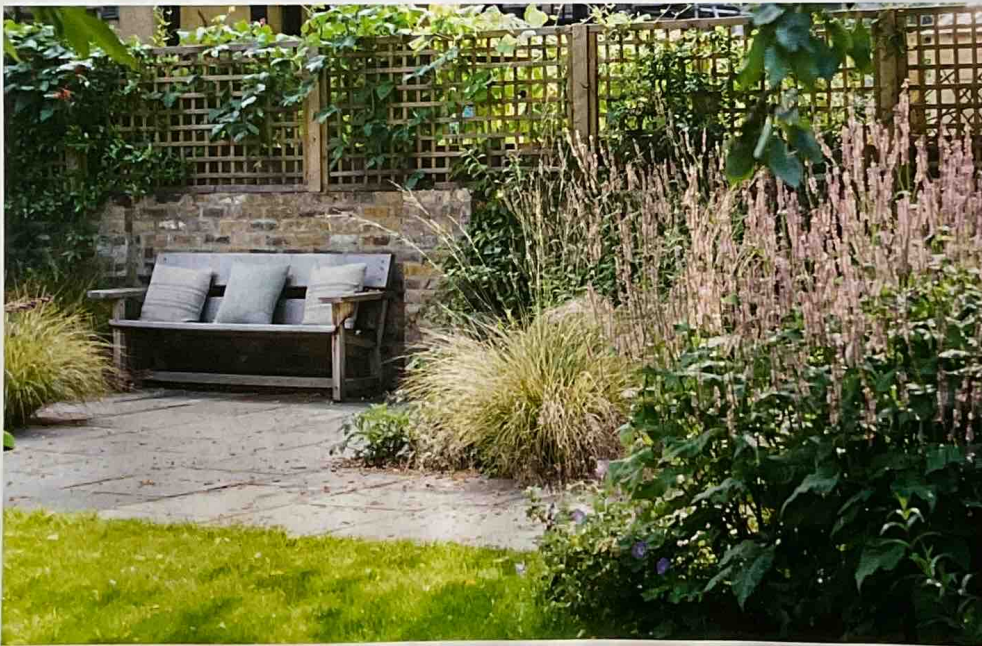
A generous band of this paving tracks around the blocky contours of the back of the house, with a couple of broad steps down to the garden, which double as a place to perch, but Miria was reluctant to site a wider terrace here. The plot is north-facing, so the sunniest spot is at the far end, where Miria has made ample space for easy chairs and a dining table under a simple cedar pergola, where it catches the evening sun. But her decision was about more than the garden's aspect.

Miria also wanted to draw people away from the house so that they are encouraged to fully experience the outside space. "The risk with a short, wide site such as this is that it can be taken in at a glance," she explains. "So my aim was to encourage people not ▷

Above left Tall plants, such as *Bistorta amplexicaulis* 'Rosea' and *Selinum wallichianum* lead the eye upwards, offsetting the drop in levels from house to garden.

Top The planting mix in the south-facing front garden was designed to be drought-tolerant with a subtle colour palette of blue, lilacs, purples and whites from plants such as *Origanum laevigatum* 'Herrenhausen' and the violet-blue flowers of *Salvia yangii* 'Blue Spire'.

Above The clean lines of the garden room extension are in sharp contrast to the horticultural fireworks in the planted areas, which partially screen the garden beyond. Hazy grasses, including *Anemathelle lessoniana*, are studded with the intense purple flowers of *Penstemon* 'Raven'. Towering over them all, a diaphanous cloud of *Thalictrum delavayi* 'Album'.



Above top Miria located the greenhouse in the sunniest spot, against the south-facing back wall where its glass roof reflects the canopies of neighbouring trees. "So that the building is partially absorbed into nature and really feels like it belongs." In front of it, raised beds allow the owners to grow a variety of edibles with the help of their young children.

Above Miria was involved in all the details of this garden, including this reclaimed timber bench by Harbour Designs. The garden walls were rebuilt with reclaimed brick, topped with a simple trellis, both chosen to gently recede into the background rather than dominate the view, while the evergreen climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides* will green up the boundaries in time.

▷ to hover by the house, but to journey out and engage with the whole garden." This she also achieves through her imaginative approach to planting.

Around a central lawn Miria has positioned densely planted beds that align with sightlines from the kitchen table, the living room and the study-cum-library. The clean linear structure of this garden. "There are grasses such as *Calamagrostis brachytricha* that swirl in the breeze and tall plants such as airy *Thalictrum delavayi* 'Album' and the providing tantalising glimpses of the garden beyond."

With one eye always on sustainability, Miria was keen to work with the garden's mature *Fraxinus excelsior* and *Robinia pseudoacacia* trees. "They offer a different scale and cast dappled shade that moves around the garden, animating different areas at different times of the day." She also added a multi-stem ornamental cherry tree, *Prunus* 'Tai-haku', to create a focal point towards the rear of the garden and to screen the dining area. Multi-stem trees, this time *Amelanchier x lamarckii*, also make an appearance in the front garden, which was also part of Miria's brief. The device of dense planting, here including *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna', is repeated, but without the same need to achieve a screening height and this scheme



My aim was to encourage people not to hover by the house, but to journey out and engage with the whole garden

is drought-tolerant. This south-facing plot was once a herb garden well-known in the local community and Miria has honoured its history with *Salvia officinalis* 'Purpurascens' and *Salvia rosmarinus* 'Miss Jessopp's Upright', the latter provides strong verticals that anchor these beds through the lean winter months.

Miria likes to add edibles to her planting plans, "for humans and wildlife alike" and was delighted when the owners here asked her for a low-maintenance productive garden as part of their wish list. On the sunny back wall, there are espaliered cherry trees *Prunus avium* 'Regina' and *Prunus avium* 'Bigarreau Napoléon' with a plum tree, *Prunus domestica* 'Czar', close by, as well as raised beds where the owners grow Jerusalem artichokes, beetroot, chard and broccoli. A greenhouse was also part of the brief and while it made sense to site this against the sunny rear wall, Miria worked hard to ensure that it did not attract undue attention. Its black guttering and warm cedar timber echo the colours of the wall, while its upstand makes use of the same bricks as the new additions to the house it faces. "It was just one of the benefits of working alongside the architect to create one seamless package." □

Above At the owners' request Miria has included a central lawn on which the children can play, with selections of planting slicing into it in key areas. She has chosen the sunniest part of the garden, against the back wall, as the location for a pair of bespoke lounge chairs by furniture maker David Blair Ross. Nearby a simple pergola surrounds a dining area, that is offered additional shade from a selection of trees, including the multi-stemmed *Prunus* 'Tai-haku'. The owners specifically asked for grasses and ferns to be included in the planting scheme, and here Miria has added *Calamagrostis brachytricha* and *Dryopteris affinis* to a mix of soft planting that also includes *Selinum wallichianum* and *Geranium Rozanne* (= 'Gerwat').

USEFUL INFORMATION

For more information on Miria's work visit miriaharris.com