

KEY ELEMENTS

What Small city garden.

Where Central London.

Soil New topsoil mixed with recycled soil from excavation.

Size 14m x 7m.

Aspect North facing.

Special features Level changes following a basement extension.

Designed by Cameron Landscapes & Gardens (camerongardens.co.uk).

Most garden designers talk about getting to know a site before they set to work, but few can hope to know a space as well as Alasdair Cameron did when tackling this project just off High Street Kensington in London.

Alasdair originally designed the garden in 1998 and has maintained it ever since, even when the house was sold and new owners moved in. When, 13 years later, they decided on a major refurbishment, lowering the basement to enlarge the kitchen, it was clear the garden would need remodelling too, and Alasdair was the obvious choice.

“So often garden design is bolted on at the end of a house renovation,” says Alasdair, “but the amazing thing about this project was that I was involved pre planning permission. The clients co-ordinated everything brilliantly so that we could work closely with the architects and ensure that we had everything in place to make the garden a success.”

As with most city basement extensions, the challenges were chiefly around linking the wildly different levels of the garden; ensuring there was enough light to the lower storey and, since the new walls are made of glass, in forging a connection between outside and in. “The garden makes a huge contribution to the wellbeing of the clients and their family and they wanted something relaxed and calming,” says Alasdair, “a sanctuary that would look good throughout the year.”

Steps were clearly going to be needed from the small terrace outside the kitchen to the main garden level and, to prevent the ascent being too high, Alasdair decided to lower the latter by about 600mm; a huge undertaking. But there was a problem – ▶

A series of stepped raised beds – filled with a lush mix of planting that includes *Asplenium scolopendrium*, *Rosmarinus officinalis* Prostratus Group and is dominated by a striking *Dicksonia antarctica* tree fern, create an enclosed and intimate seating area outside the new kitchen extension.



Urban sanctuary

In this city garden, designer Alasdair Cameron has made the most of wildly differing levels to create a dynamic yet tranquil space – a refuge from London's busy streets

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Above Grey louvered panels on the wall create privacy while allowing light into the basement kitchen. Pots in the side return are used to add seasonal interest.

Right Different levels help create distinctive areas that are linked by the repeat planting of striking plants.

Below left Limestone steps leading to the lower level are softened by ribbons of *Soleirolia soleirolii*.

Below right Clay bricks laid in a herringbone pattern are fringed by fresh-green *Dryopteris filix-mas*.

Facing page

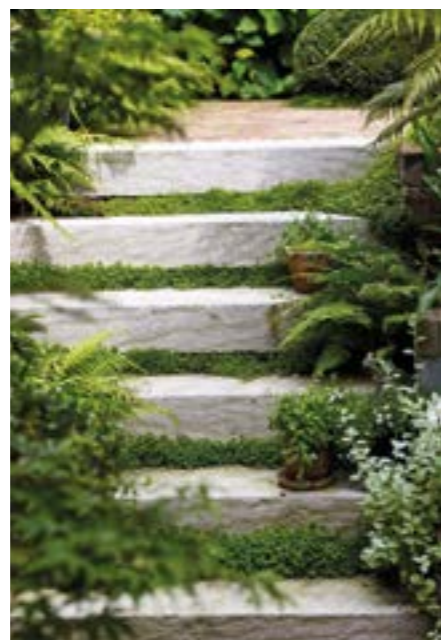
The planting uses a predominately green palette, playing with different foliage shapes and textures. Alastair also adds annuals, such as ammi and orlaya, to add colour. A grey pigment used on walls and planters helps to brighten the green and tie the planting in with the furniture and the kitchen's decor.



The clients wanted a sanctuary that would look good throughout the year

▷ an established *Magnolia grandiflora*, which neither Alastair nor the client was prepared to lose. Working closely with an arborist and the architect, they were able to preserve the roots and incorporate it into the design. Further collaboration brought other benefits too. Having been able to specify the correct drainage at the planning stage, Alastair was able to build in raised beds planted up with a shade-loving mix of *Asplenium scolopendrium*, *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Golf Ball' and a tree fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*), thereby considerably reducing the impact of the retaining wall.

Throughout the space, Alastair has ensured cohesion by using a limited palette of materials. Clay bricks laid in a herringbone pattern echo the wooden floor within, while the limestone of the steps matches that into which the glass doors are set. "In such a small space, I like to keep things simple, otherwise it gets too busy and makes the space look



Working with a green colour palette

Top tips from designer Alastair Cameron

Thinking of foliage plants as just 'green' belies the many different shades there are to play with. For example, mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolii*) is a bright, almost electric green; *Stauntonia hexaphylla*, a favourite climber of mine, is an appley green, while *muehlenbeckia* has a more brownish hue.

When you're using just one colour, foliage texture and proportion take on a far greater importance. I think spheres of *Taxus baccata*, *Hebe rakaiensis* and *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Golf Ball' look great together – the leaf sizes are similar but they provide both different shades and textures.

Use evergreens for winter interest and structure, but make sure you have some summer flowers nearby. Evergreens can feel a bit dark in summer.

Ferns are great plants for a green garden – they have so many different textures and shapes – and they are especially good when they unfurl. I love the glossy, crinkled leaves of the hart's tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and the shuttlecock clumps of the male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*.

Think about the different planes in your garden and how to dress them. I use *Trachelospermum jasminoides* like a curtain of foliage, and I love the way prostrate rosemary sprawls across the tops of walls or planters.

smaller," says Alastair. He's applied this logic to the planting, too, using a mainly green, white and pale-pink palette, with evergreen yew domes, tree ferns and 'curtains' of scented *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Stauntonia hexaphylla* for year-round interest. Seasonal lifts come courtesy of *Rosa* 'Cécile Brünner', long-flowering *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle', the spring blossom on a pleached panel of *Malus domestica* 'James Grieve' at the rear of the garden, and in the *Parthenocissus henryana*, which turns a glorious red in autumn.

Although the planting spaces are relatively small, the effect is full and tranquil and, most importantly, the space works incredibly well. With three different seating areas for different moods and occasions and an outdoor shower tucked in next to the magnolia, this is very much an outside room – and one that more than lives up to the brief of providing a sanctuary from the busy city beyond. □