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FRESH PERSPECTIVE

BY EXCHANGING BAMBOO AND OLIVE TREES FOR
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RUSTIC MOTIFS TO TIE IN WITH THE NATURE
RESERVE BEYOND, THE BRAZIER'S LONDON GARDEN
HAS BEEN GIVEN A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

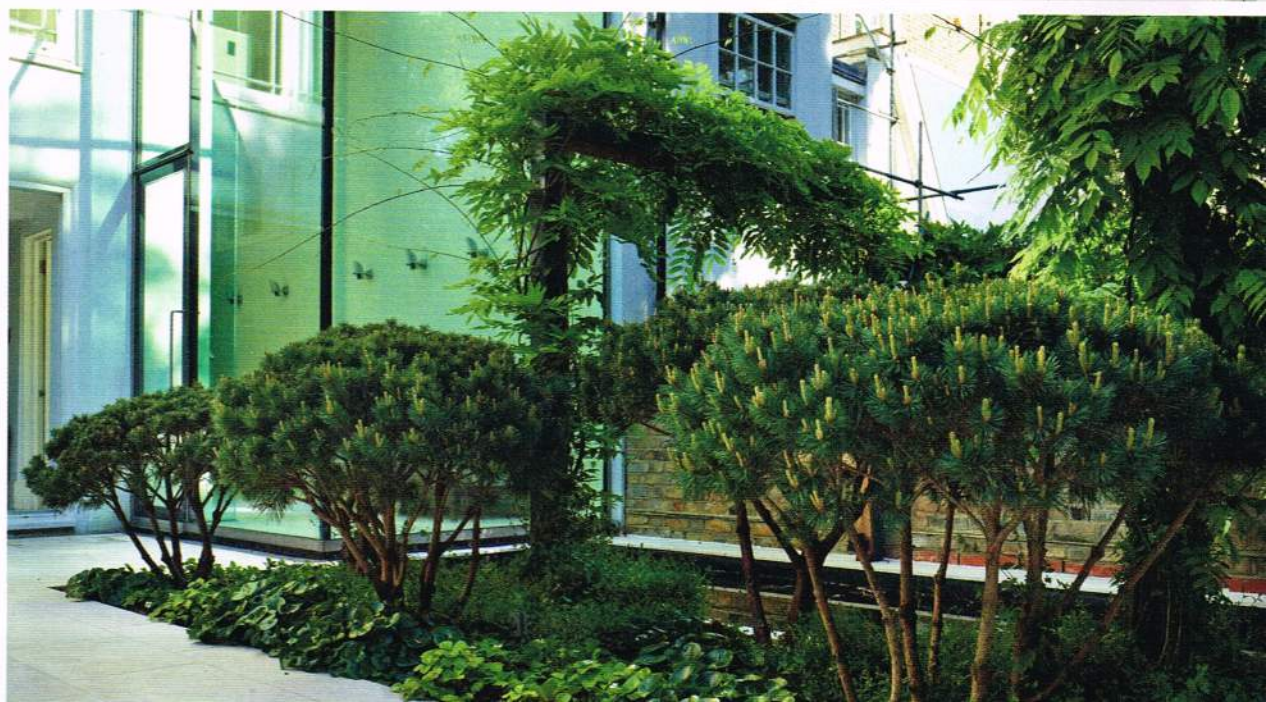
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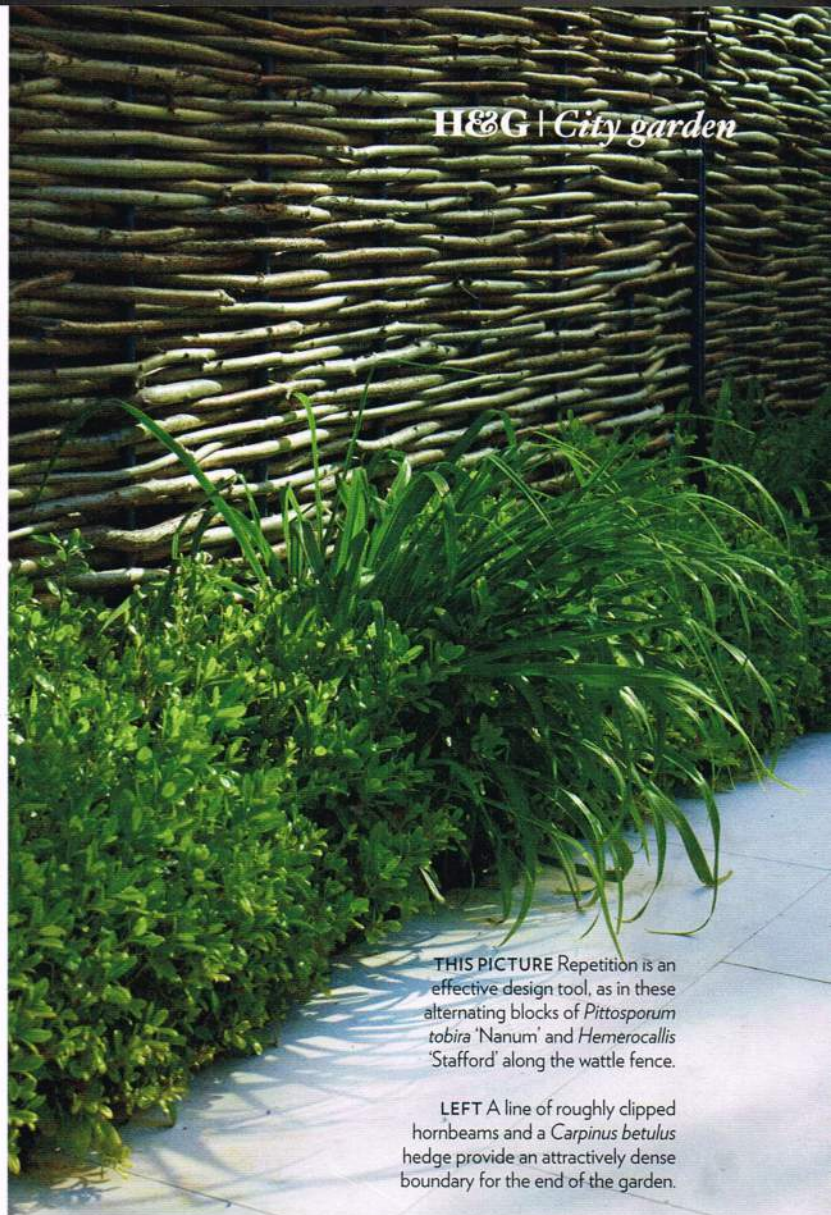


ABOVE LEFT A mature *Wisteria sinensis* entwines the aluminium pergola, which unites different areas of the garden across a pool stocked with koi carp.

ABOVE Double doors open from the kitchen on to the cool green garden with its woodland backdrop.

RIGHT Slow-growing *Pinus sylvestris* 'Watereri' are underplanted with *Cornus canadensis* and *Asarum europaeum*. The beds are mulched with gravel to suppress weeds and provide continuity between plantings.





H&G | City garden

THIS PICTURE Repetition is an effective design tool, as in these alternating blocks of *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum' and *Hemerocallis* 'Stafford' along the wattle fence.

LEFT A line of roughly clipped hornbeams and a *Carpinus betulus* hedge provide an attractively dense boundary for the end of the garden.

What works for one person does not necessarily work for another, be it in the home or the garden, and so it proved for Paul and Diane Brazier when they bought their five-storey Victorian house in north London five years ago. The garden, while contemporary and professionally designed, was not laid out or planted in quite the way the couple wanted. A pool with a glass surround sliced through the site like a knife, and the planting – Asian bamboo and Mediterranean olives – felt rather too rigid, set, as it was, against the rampant growth of the local nature reserve that lies beyond the garden walls.

"We tried to work out what to do," Paul recalls. "I considered putting a bridge of some kind over the water, to connect the two sides of the garden." The planting, meanwhile, had to be softer and more fulsome and verdant. To achieve this, the couple realised they needed a professional designer and so, having admired his Gold medal-winning designs at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, they took their ideas and some drawings to Philip Nixon. "It was worth jotting down a plan," Paul explains, "because it helped Philip understand what we hoped to achieve."

There was already good access to the garden, through a double-height glass atrium and double doors from the kitchen, and Philip decided to keep the limestone paving and the pool. To create a very different aspect, however, he realigned the paving, adding and subtracting stone in

"THE PLANTING HAS PLEASED US MOST. IT HAS TRANSFORMED THE GARDEN."

places, and removed the glass and the planting from around the pool, for a clear view. Next, to bring the two sections of garden on either side of the pool together, Paul's idea of a bridge was reinterpreted as a pergola made of two powder-coated aluminium frames trained with white wisteria. While the rest of the newly installed planting is limited in range – slow-growing pines, hornbeams and ground-hugging wild ginger, creeping bellflower and dwarf cornel dominate – it is much less rigid than before. There is also now a soothing colour palette of green and white, with the occasional fleck of purple, and a harmonious repetition of plants. Seven umbrella-shaped, multi-stemmed *Pinus sylvestris* 'Watereri' run through a bed set parallel to the pool. These are underplanted with the wild ginger, *Asarum europaeum*, *Campanula poscharskyana* and *Cornus canadensis*, all woodland plants that Philip selected as much for their textural and shaped foliage as for their flowers.

At the far end, a raised platform of limestone has been put in to help extend the geometry of the space and give a sense of route

around the 40-foot-long garden, while cutting the length of the pool and helping to make the area seem wider. A pair of shallow grey resin bowls planted with lime-green sempervivums and mulched with gravel provides a decorative, urban note set against the limestone and the green combination of a tall *Carpinus*



betulus hedge fronted by a row of semi-pleached hornbeams. The woodland theme is picked up again here, with an under-planting of purple *Geranium phaeum* 'Lily Lovell' and, together with the trees and hedge, the whole effect draws the eye to the nature reserve beyond. To subtly countrify the scene, Philip has lined the third boundary wall with a wattle screen fixed on a metal frame. At the foot of this modern interpretation of a traditional country fence flows a line of alternating *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum' and *Hemerocallis* 'Stafford', with a *Rosa* 'Climbing Iceberg' to add height.

Although Paul has his reservations about keeping the limestone – "It's too soft and needs constant cleaning," he says – overall, the redesign has been a huge success. It has given the Braziers a town garden that is a pleasing balance of sharp-edged contemporary materials and soft planting, and has also provided them with a sophisticated outdoor room where they can entertain and their young children can play. "It's the planting that pleases us most," says Diane, "because it has transformed the garden." ■

GARDEN GUIDE

SOIL London clay.

ORIENTATION West-facing, but shady.

KEY FEATURES Shallow rectangular pool, aluminium

pergola, limestone paving.

GARDEN DESIGN

Philip Nixon Design,

020 7371 0066,

philipnixondesign.com.



THIS PICTURE For the children, Eva and Jude, the redesigned garden is a paradise, but they also make the most of the nature reserve at the end of the garden when they can.

LEFT From a raised seat set at the far end of the pool, you can sit and enjoy the house and wisteria reflected in the water.

