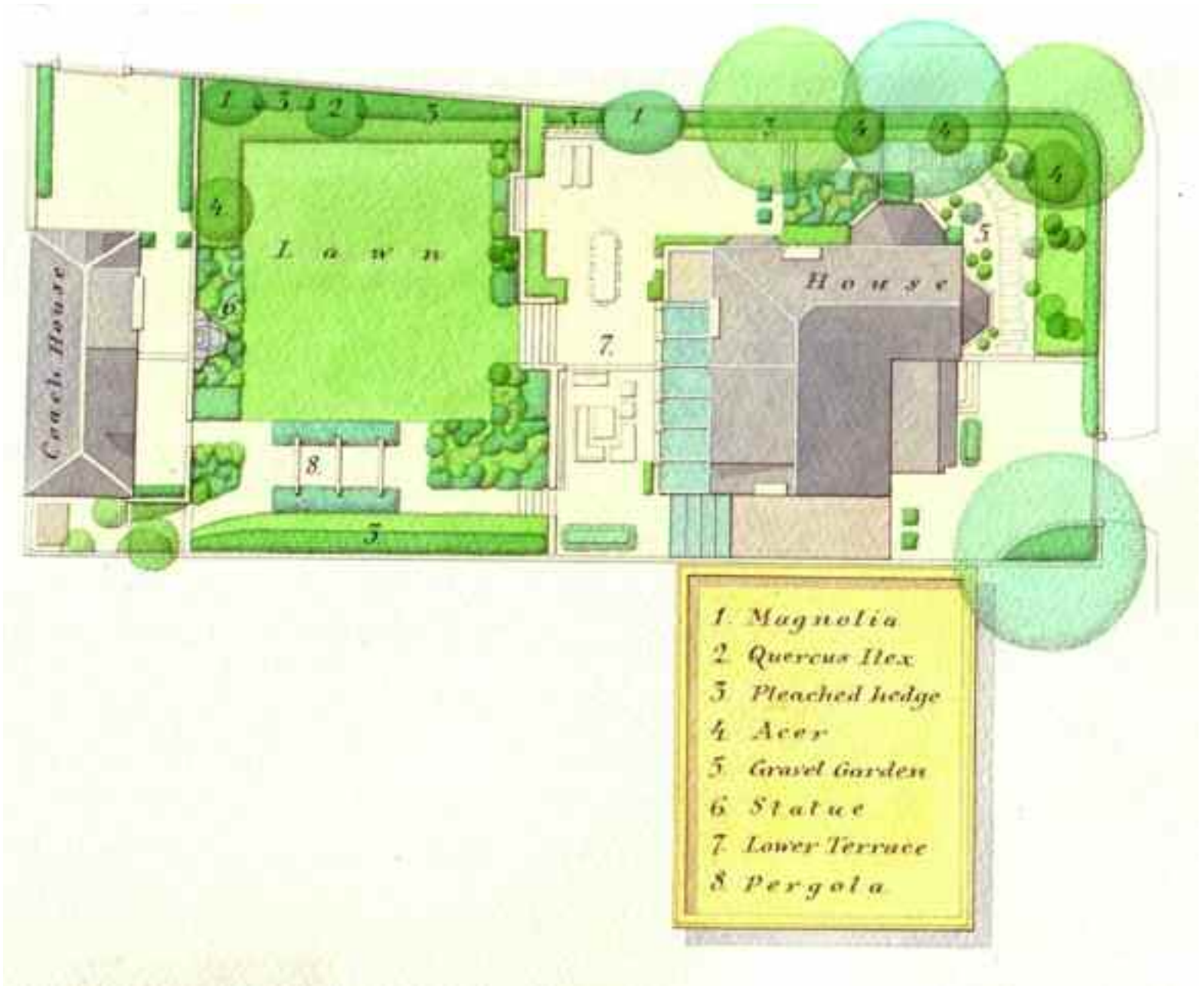




# MODERNIST FOCUS

Garden designer Laara Copley-Smith combined both hard and soft elements to achieve a bespoke garden for north London clients and in the process proved that suburban doesn't have to mean boring ►

PHOTOGRAPHS **STEVEN WOOSTER/THE GARDEN COLLECTION** WORDS **JACKIE BENNETT**



**W**hen Laara Copley-Smith was invited to design a garden in the leafy suburbs of London's Crouch Hill, the owners were just about to start major renovations on their early 20th-century home.

The double-fronted house had been virtually derelict and their vision was to transform the property, keeping original features but adding a statement rear extension of glass and steel that would link the house and garden in a new way. In addition, there was an old coachhouse at the end of the garden that would be integral to the design when it was finally restored.

Getting involved in the project early was the key for Laara, so that the house, garden, and coachhouse could integrate in the design as one complete space.

The garden was on a busy corner, with two roads bounding the 1,200sq m site. The brief was for a contemporary garden that would

## Garden profile

**DESIGNER** Laara Copley-Smith

**GARDEN DETAILS** Private garden in north west London.

**SIZE** Plot is 22 x 55m (including house)

**SITE** Front, side and rear of detached, period house, fronting two busy roads.

**STYLE** Formal classical structure with a streamlined, modernist feel.

be sympathetic to the original architecture. Laara says: 'The concept was of simplicity, with a refined elegance. When you say contemporary, it can conjure up pictures of spiky plants and vivid colour for many people. I prefer to call this garden formal and classic, but with a modernist essence.'

From the start, Laara aimed for a simple structure of high-quality materials, teamed

with confident planting. It needed to reflect the contemporary feel of the interior and the carefully restored brick and render exterior too. The owners have three children and do a lot of entertaining, so there also needed to be plenty of seating for family, friends and colleagues.

The site was sloping and heavily compacted, so experts were brought in to carry out decompaction (a processing involving the injection of oxygen and seaweed into the soil to aid drainage).

Then Laara and her team got to work on the levels, creating a perfectly smooth transition from the house onto the terrace and making steps up to the lawn and planting.

Everything, from the colour of the render on the walls to the cut of the sandstone was specifically selected to suit the building, without slavishly copying it.

'In the end,' says Laara, 'we have created a streamlined look that won't date.'

# Garden elements

The walls, paving and blocks of evergreen planting form a solid, dense framework into which softer, perennial planting can be inserted to create a cool, sophisticated effect.

**HIDDEN CHARMS** Planting around the terrace (above left), with its black day beds and seating pods, is deliberately restrained. Box balls are 'hidden' amongst the planting, making sure there is solidity when the perennials die back in winter.

**LAYERS OF DETAIL** The rendered walls (left) are flanked by cushions of box which in turn hide the 'feet' of the pleached photinia along the fence. The upright tree is a clipped *Quercus ilex*.

*Everything, from the colour of the render on the walls to the cut of the sandstone, was specifically selected*



**FRONT GRAVEL GARDEN** Stylish and functional, the approach to the side gateway (above) uses clipped box balls, grasses (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Yakushima Dwarf') and vibrant acers to contrast with the hard materials.

**NEARLY WHITE** Off-white is the colour chosen to link furniture, paving and walls (above left).

**PERENNIAL PLANTING** Throughout the space, perennials are repeated in blocks (above right). *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Album' and echinacea soften the view of the new extension.

**PLEACHED WALKWAY** Evergreen photinia were used in the main garden instead of the more usual hornbeam, kept closely clipped (left). To the right is *Penstemon* 'Garnet' and at the end, *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'. ▶



All the furniture was chosen to match the style of the garden - modern yet elegant and rectangular in form. The pieces are from 'Modena'. [www.modena-furniture.co.uk](http://www.modena-furniture.co.uk)

Against the solid, sculptural quality of the walls, trees and shrubs, the perennial planting is the perfect counterfoil. Here *Penstemon* 'Gamet' and paler *Agastache* 'Tangerine Dreams' appear to float above the solid shapes, adding colour and light.

The English sawn sandstone of the hard landscaping is naturally light in colour, with a mix of buff, grey and cream tones. The larger size of paving stone gives a clean, spacious, look.

The block-and-render retaining walls are both functional and stylish. They have been painted with an off-white Farrow & Ball paint to tone with the coachhouse.

## Split-level living

The rear garden sloped substantially, so the first job for the designer and her team was to create a perfectly level lower terrace leading seamlessly from the house, and matching the floor levels in the extension. A slightly raised level to the back of the terrace makes an intimate lounging area. Steps then lead up to the upper level towards the coachhouse, which is retained with rendered walls. This creates defined spaces: a lower entertaining area and an upper area of lawn and planting for relaxation and play, which seamlessly connect.

The pergola consists of brushed stainless steel beams, which have been deliberately left unplanted to bring an third dimension to the garden without adding visual 'clutter'. Small lights have been inserted in the overhead beams.

Planted en masse in blocks, *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah' softens the metal framework.

The restored coachhouse has a grey slate roof and off-white rendering that are picked up elsewhere in the garden design.

The single large statue was chosen by the owners and sits looking out over the garden. It is gently flushed with light at night (see page 72).



# Lighting

**Illumination was planned in the original design and connects to an internal computer system. If planning something similar, you must use a Part P-compliant, qualified electrician.**

**WALL LIGHTS** On the the extension (*above right*) and on the coachhouse (*right*), pillar lights are used. They contain two bulbs; one to shine upwards and one downwards, flushing the wall with light in both directions.

**SPOT LIGHTING** Black-coloured spike spots that can be pushed into the soil and moved around as necessary are used to light the planting (*below*). Black does not draw attention to itself in the beds.



**PATH LIGHTING** Set into the sides of the steps (*above*) are three-way facet lights - low profile, stainless steel lights available with one-, two-, three- or four-way 'facets', giving different beam options for paths and steps. Hunza produces a range of these lights, available through specialist lighting suppliers.

**POLE SPOTS** Where the planting is taller, adjustable pole lights in powder coated bronze (*above, near right*) can be moved up and down to suit the height of the plants.

**INDIRECT LIGHTING** Overall, the lighting is subtle, washing individual elements with light rather than flooding the whole garden. The statue (*above, far right*) is lit indirectly, and elsewhere in the garden, tiny recessed LED lights add definition to terraces, steps and pathways.



*Getting the garden designer involved early meant that the lighting could be an integral part of the project*



## DESIGNER PROFILE

● Laara Copley-Smith set up her Surrey-based practice, Garden and Landscape Design, in 1998 after working in TV, film and theatre for 10 years. She specialises in bespoke garden design, encompassing classical, formal and traditional gardens and works in the UK and internationally. Garden and Landscape Design. Tel: +44 (0)1276 507345 or +44 (0)7947 070454. You can also visit her website for more information: [www.garden-landscape-design.co.uk](http://www.garden-landscape-design.co.uk)

