

Fruit trees including crab apple 'Evereste', the apples 'Bramley's Seedling' and 'James Grieve', and plum 'Victoria' are underplanted by wildflower turf

PHOTOGRAPHS: Richard Bloom
WORDS: Belinda Cooper

HIDDEN GEM

Peter Reader MSGD reinvigorated a tired walled garden in London, creating this elegant, tranquil retreat

THIS PAGE As the house offers good views of the garden, Reader designed it to look pleasing from above

OPPOSITE, TOP Multi-stemmed *Amelanchier* give a focal point in the shady third of the garden **BELOW** The rill takes advantage of the step up in level to the pool, which features planting including *Elodea canadensis*, *Iris louisiana* 'Black Gamecock' and *Zantedeschia* 'Crowborough'



Peter Reader MSGD worked in medicine before retraining as a garden designer, and launched Peter Reader Landscapes in 2013, working mostly in North London. He has also won two RHS Silver-Gilt medals at the RHS Hampton Court Flower Show. readerlandscapes.com

Walking into this Highgate garden for the first time, Peter Reader MSGD could feel its potential instantly. "It was gorgeous, but sad and tired," he says. "There was a sunken trampoline and a dried-up pool. Overgrown shrubs made the whole place feel smaller and hid the fantastic wall around the outside that added to the magic of it."

With their children heading off to university, the clients now wanted a garden for themselves. "They wanted fruit trees and to reinstate water to bring nature into the garden. They liked modern perennial planting but, other than that, were very open to me designing what I thought would work well." It was a dream brief. "What I enjoy is creating spaces and atmosphere, the places that people will be drawn to within gardens."

Reader grew up walking in the South Downs and the Weald and takes inspiration from the natural world. "Nature is very good at creating fantastic atmospheric spaces where colour and light work together. I try to

transpose that effect into gardens." He came to garden design from a career in medicine, retraining in 2012 at KLC School of Design. Many of his projects are private gardens in North London, where he lives.

Creating a place to be

"As a designer, you're thinking about a cohesive space. How does it fit together, how does it fit within its surroundings?" he says. "But also, what makes it interesting, attractive and comfortable? I talk with clients about having stories and journeys within the garden. There's a lot of that happening in this garden."

Reader had two viewpoints in mind whilst designing. "I was thinking about being in it, but also being above it. The upstairs rooms have good views over the garden, so I was keen to have a pleasing structure looking down."

He kept little of the original garden. The first step was clearing the walls, exposing the attractive brickwork and added trellises with *Trachelospermum* and box cubes to give structure. He benefitted from mature trees in neighbouring gardens and kept a *Robinia* that screens a church next door. At the other end is a flowering cherry.

The new garden works roughly in thirds, with each area corresponding to viewpoints from the house. The first is opposite a large glazed kitchen extension. "That area was shaded and damp," says Reader. "I wanted it to be usable, so put down an all-weather surface with two multi-stemmed *Amelanchier* and a seat. I picked up the edging with cobblestones, which I then ran through the →



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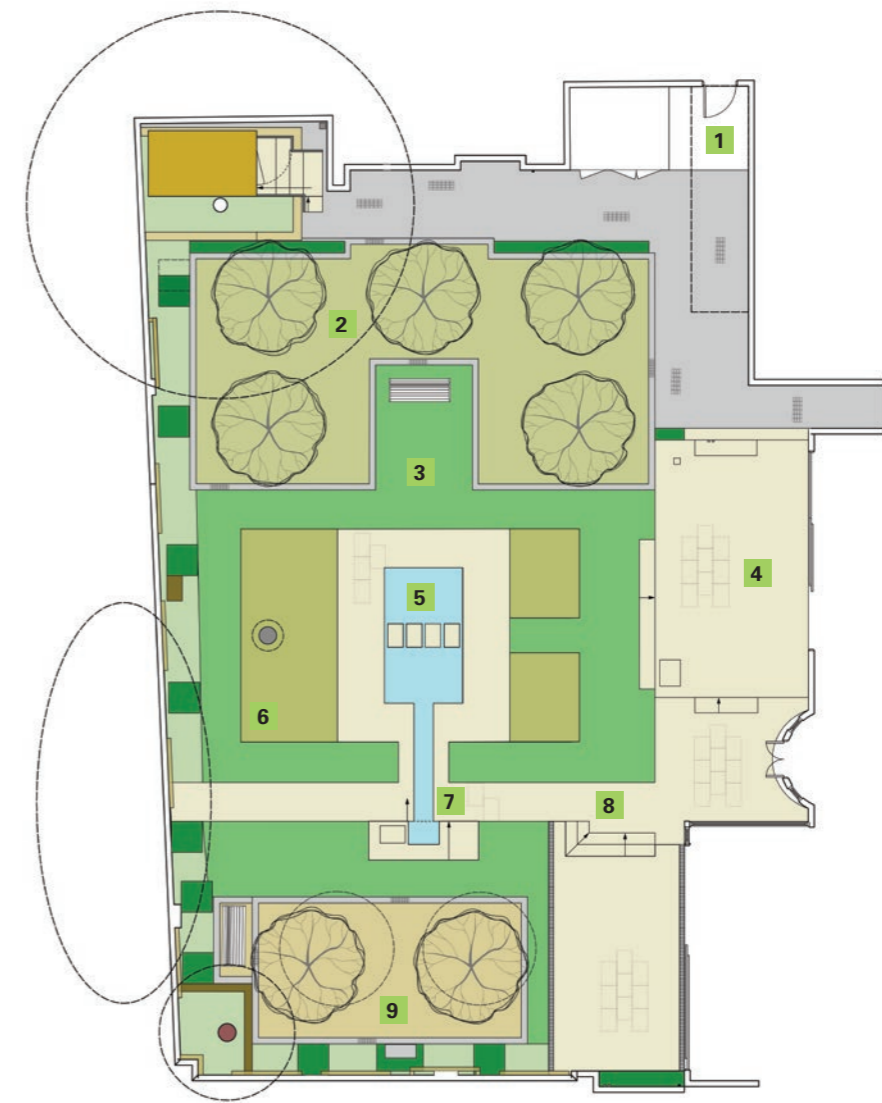
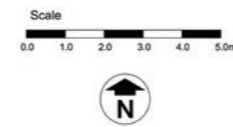


TOP Reader had to manage the black fire escape from the neighbouring church within the design **BELOW** The beds are planted with box balls and *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' and perennials including *Verbena*, *Rudbeckia* and *Geranium* Rozanne, and the trellises feature climbers like *Trachelospermum* and *Clematis* 'The President'



GARDEN PLAN

1. Fire escape
2. Fruit trees and wildflower turf
3. Lawn
4. Terrace
5. Pool with stepping stones
6. Sundial with planting
7. Rill and spout
8. Steps
9. *Amelanchier* trees on hoggin



WHO'S WHO

Contractor
Belderbos Landscapes
belderbos.co.uk

Paving
Artisans of Devizes
artisansofdevizes.com

Setts and gravel
CED
Ltd.cedstone.co.uk

Trellis
Jacksons Fencing
jacksons-fencing.co.uk

Pumps and lights
Landscapeplus
landscapeplus.com

Lawn turf
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tillersturf.co.uk

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Wildflower Turf
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Majestic Trees
majestictrees.co.uk
New Wood Trees
newwoodtrees.co.uk

Plants
Provender
provendernurseries.co.uk
North Hill Nurseries
northhillnurseries.co.uk
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"THE GARDEN IN SOME WAYS IS VERY OPEN, BUT BECAUSE OF THE NATURALISTIC PLANTING AND THE WALLS, IT FEELS COSY"

rest of the garden to tie it together. Looking from above, you can see the cobblestones giving that structure."

The middle area is more formal and contains the pond, centred between beds of perennials and grasses. Reader widened the existing patio and extended the limestone paving, giving a more open feel. "It felt natural to place the water feature opposite there," he says. "I also wanted to pick up the long axis of the garden. The rill running off the front of the pool highlights that."

The garden sloped, so Reader created a formal level change and added a low wall, which the rill runs over. The stepping stones across the pond draw the eye out from the house to an armillary sundial on the other side. Aquatic planting encourages wildlife.

Finding focal points

The third area is furthest from the house and more informal. New fruit trees soften the church behind and are underplanted with wildflowers and naturalised bulbs. "When you sit under the trees, you look down the

pond and rill to another small water feature on the far wall between the *Amelanchier* trees," he explains. "The clients love that wherever you are, there's a structured view and focal points that draw you through."

One thing he had to be careful with, however, is that the church next door has a fire escape that runs down into the garden. "We had to leave that clear," Reader says. "The client had some old tube maps up there, so I left those, as they give interest to the space."

Through the garden, structural evergreens such as box and rosemary are softened by bulbs and perennials. "The shade is all under the walls and the middle is sunny, so it balances nicely," says Reader.

Spring planting starts low. Snowdrops, cyclamen and scilla are followed by hellebores and *Epimedium*. Then *Euphorbia* and ferns start coming through, with *Iris sibirica* around the pond and in the beds. Through summer, the planting gets taller and bushier, creating layers of interest. *Salvia*, *Rudbeckia*, Japanese anemones, *Verbena bonariensis* and *Molinia* give height but are light and transparent.

"The garden in some ways is very open, but because of the naturalistic planting and the walls, it feels cosy," says Reader. "There are little rooms and different views within which complement each other."

He admits it is his favourite garden. "It's such a magical space. Last time I was there, it was a summer evening and the light was slanting through the grasses and perennials. It was just gorgeous." ○