



Provence in Pinner

James Scott and Alex Haerle bring the Mediterranean (and the rest of the world) to a clever London garden

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It was memories of relaxed days and warm evenings spent eating on the terrace during family holidays in the Mediterranean that inspired Rupert and Dionne Slade as they considered what to do with their outside space. James Scott (above) and Alex Haerle of The Garden Company were duly briefed and, using pale stone, a superbly appointed pergola that shades a large dining table, and a gnarled old olive tree, that's just what they delivered – albeit in suburban Pinner.

They've taken influences from across the globe along the way: stone from Ireland and China, tree ferns from Australia, and stepping stones through planting reminiscent of Japanese woodland with its acers and bamboos. This is a garden that marries many different elements, and all in a typical, square, back-garden plot measuring roughly 15 x 15 metres.

"When clients say they want a Mediterranean garden, for me that rings warning bells," says James, The Garden Company's director. "If you overtly transport Mediterranean style to the British suburbs, it travels about as well as the wine. I suppose, instead, we tried to recreate the atmosphere of the Mediterranean without it looking like a pastiche."

The garden was completely empty and laid to lawn when they first assessed it, and the biggest issue to overcome, according to James, was the feeling of



being overlooked. It's set in a row of gardens with houses to the side and the back. Rupert and Dionne never felt comfortable when they were out there, and rarely used it as a result. "We kept the hedging at the bottom where it screened the garden but took out a high hedge down the right-hand side and put in pleached hornbeams – they're a lighter way of screening," James explains.

Above The pergola's sturdy uprights support climbers that include clematis and jasmine. **Right** Acers, bamboos and stepping stones create the feeling of Japanese woodland. **Below** Slatted fencing and pleached trees offer heightened privacy.

With its slatted overhead canopy and climbers scrambling up and over the top, the pergola also provides plenty of privacy from the neighbours as well as helping to conjure up the Mediterranean atmosphere Rupert and Dionne had talked about from their holidays. Completely bespoke, it was designed by James and Alex to fit the area they'd earmarked. "It was quite a feat of engineering," James recalls. "It's such a key part of the garden, and when we went through the design process it just sort of got bigger and bigger. When we did the sums on its weight, I thought: 'What have we done?' You imagine a few guys will lift it into position, but we soon realised that wasn't going to happen. We ended up bringing in a spider crane to lift the timber into place because it was so heavy."

Building the garden took about 12 weeks in all. "It was slightly longer than intended because the access wasn't very good, and it was a lot of work and quite intricate," James explains. "Also, we didn't have a huge team on it because there wasn't really space to have separate groups doing different things simultaneously to get it done more quickly, but Rupert and Dionne were very accommodating."

Beyond the pergola, the rest of the garden is there to be explored by way of large stepping-stone



Fact file

- **Garden design** The Garden Company. Tel: 01442 832666; thegardenco.co.uk
- **Oak for the pergola and boardwalk** Ternex. Tel: 01707 324606; ternex.co.uk
- **Black Basalt and Contemporary Grey paving** London Stone. Tel: 01753 212950; londonstone.co.uk
- **Donegal walling and coping, black polished basalt water feature and stepping stones** CED Stone. Tel: 01708 867237; cedstone.co.uk
- **Lighting** Hunza, available from Light Ideas International. Tel: 01299 269950; hunzalighting.com; lightideas.co.uk
- **Furniture** Hartman. For stockists, visit hartmanuk.com

boulders and an oak boardwalk through areas of planting. "It slows the journey around the garden," James explains, "so you don't see it all at once." He describes the plants chosen as "textural woodland planting with a few specimen acers. It is a bit of a journey around the world, but we weren't trying to blend in with a native setting and the house didn't have any particular architecture that might have led the design." A few sparingly used bamboos provide screening and height, while ferns and other shade-loving foliage plants such as brunnera and woodruff, *Galium odoratum*, fill in at ground level, offering a foil for everything else.

James's team is still involved with the garden, visiting throughout the year to carry out maintenance, changing plants as necessary and adding more bulbs to the beds on the terrace. Rupert, one of the owners, is delighted with both the company and the results. "There are certain areas where you can't see the neighbours; you're just surrounded by plants," he remarks. "We had certain requirements, but The Garden Company moved it on from those. We're very pleased – I knew they were very good, but we didn't know how good until the design won a BALI (British

Association of Landscape Industries) award. Then we realised other people think it's a lovely garden as well."

Design details

PAVING AND STONE

A mixture of paving in Contemporary Grey and Black Basalt, both from London Stone, delineates the different zones of the garden. The walls and coping were built from Donegal, made by CED Stone, who also manufactured the bespoke basalt water feature. “This is less restrained than we might normally be,” says James. “Rupert and Dionne wanted something that looked crafted and bespoke; nothing too traditional, but with a bit of texture. So after looking at a few samples we arrived at a combination of things we felt worked together, while offering a bit of contrast.” Also from CED Stone were the stepping stone ‘boulders’, actually porphyry plattens which naturally tend to be smooth, rounded and flat, making them ideal.

PERGOLA AND BOARDWALK

Built to measure from solid oak from the Ternex sawmill in Welwyn, Hertfordshire, the boardwalk’s upright supports are 150mm square and are concreted into the ground. “At that thickness they should last for at least 40 years,” notes James. The fencing along the boundary and its bespoke slatted top section were made from iroko timber.

PLANTING

In the wilder part of the garden, specimen plants such as *Acer palmatum* ‘Garnet’, ‘Osakazuki’ and ‘Sango-kaku’, with flowering *Cornus kousa* ‘China Girl’ and bamboos such as *Phyllostachys aurea* and black-stemmed *P. nigra* create a planting scheme with a slight Japanese influence. Shade



lovers such as bold-leaved *Helleborus argutifolius*, brunnera, *Epimedium x rubrum* and *Alchemilla mollis* complete the ‘woodland floor’, along with the scented white flowers of *Galium odoratum*.

On the terrace, next to the pergola, the planting is more obviously ‘Mediterranean’, with a silver-leaved olive taking pride of place (find similar at Villaggio Verde), lavender enjoying the sunnier conditions, box pyramids for formality and structure, and climbers such as scented *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, the potato vine *Solanum crispum* ‘Glasnevin’, and clematis including ‘Niobe’ and purple ‘The President’ clothing the pergola. In spring, *Allium* ‘Mont Blanc’ erupts from the beds bearing globes of greenish-white. “They do their stuff and then they can pretty well be left until the heads fall over, at which point grasses, including pennisetum and *Stipa gigantea*, take over,” explains James. ■

Above The pergola’s slatted ‘ceiling’ hides the terrace’s dining area from neighbours.

Below right A combination of pale cream paving and darker basalt works well against the textured stone walls.

Below left The flattened shape of porphyry plattens makes them perfect stepping stones.

