

SLIM AND SHAPELY

Commissioned to create a space referencing the paintings of Vermeer, garden designer Andy Sturgeon has created an intimate, contemporary place for a London client

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Stepping into the garden at the rear of one of the choicest addresses in London, the scent of *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (star jasmine) is intoxicating – a welcome respite from the noise and heat of the city. The plant cloaks almost all the walls of this long slender space, its constellations of starry flowers emerging liberally from glossy evergreen foliage. This is a cool space in every sense of the word – a refreshing contrast to the grumpy traffic queuing on the Chelsea Embankment.

Rectangular gardens, which lie behind most terraced housing in the UK, are tricky. So often, narrow flower beds edge a featureless lawn or, in this case, when international designer Andy Sturgeon first saw it (in 20XX), an expanse of concrete paving. The house was being renovated and it was decided to overhaul the garden at the same time. A building at the bottom serves as a work studio, so year-round interest was part of the brief. The owner also wanted a contemporary space in which to entertain and relax. Privacy was another consideration, requiring as much screening from neighbours as possible and as a final challenge, he wanted it to reference the paintings of Jan Vermeer (the 17th-century Dutch painter of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* fame).

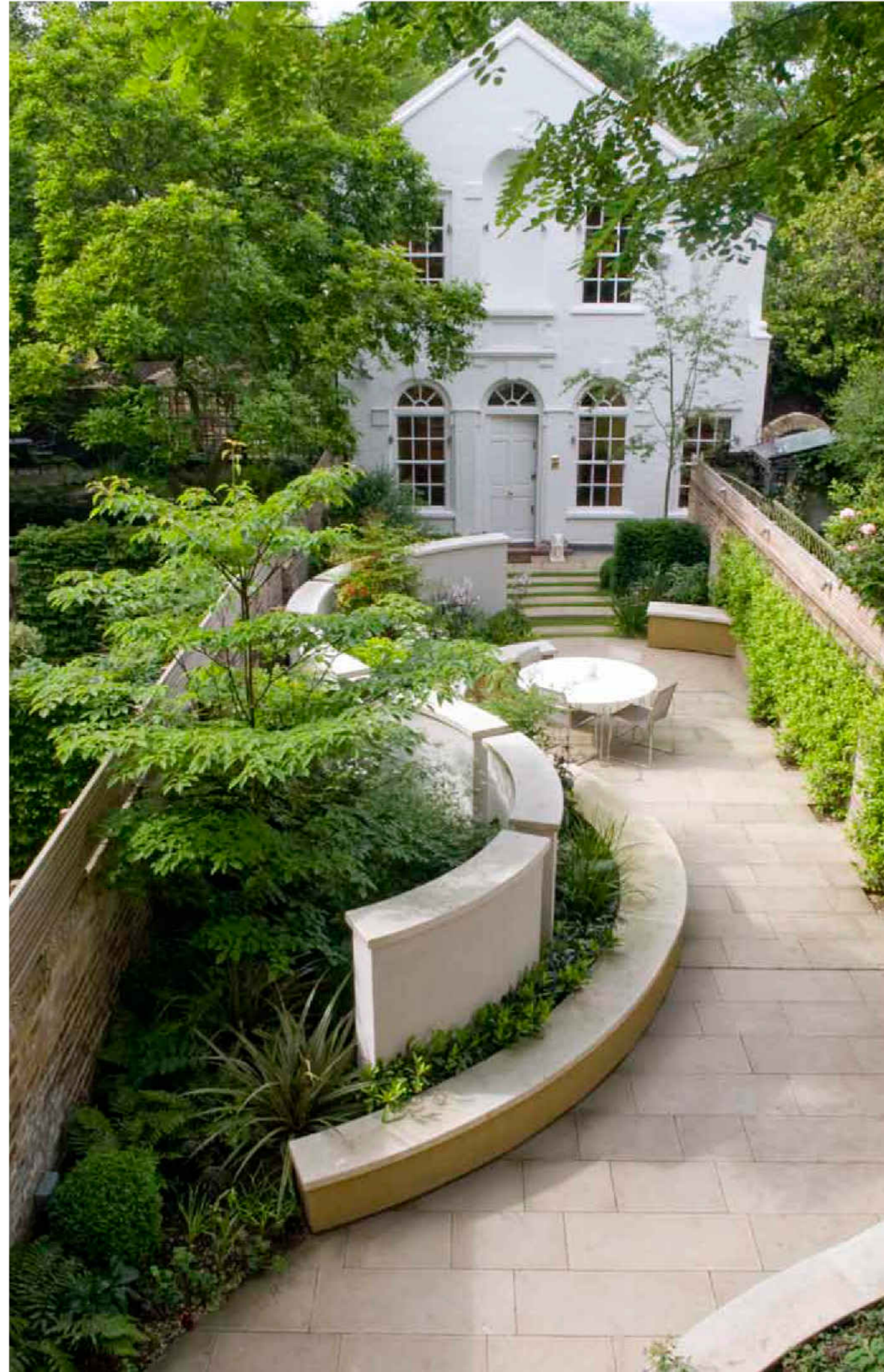
Verdant retreat

The garden is green and leafy, not only from the proliferation of evergreens climbing the walls (such as finger-leaved *Pileostegia viburnoides*), but also from a mature *Robinia pseudoacacia* and a gracefully tiered *Cornus controversa*. The cornus sits behind a rendered

The curving contours of the walls (right) disguise the narrowness of this garden in Chelsea, London and lead the eye around rather than directly to the work studio at the far end.

Cheyne Walk

Location: Chelsea, London SW3.
Size: 20 x 5m (66 x 16ft).
Soil type: improved London clay with imported topsoil and compost.
Summary: contemporary garden combining traditional elements with sleek modern design.
Age: finished in 2008.
Key season of interest: year-round.
Aspect: north-northwest.
Open: not open to the public.



wall that rises to head height and forms a lazy 'S', travelling round in front of the tree, looping back behind a table before curving out again near the far end of the garden.

Following the wall loosely is a lower, 'bench' wall, which creates raised planting space between, filled at its narrowest with low-growing evergreen plants such as periwinkle *Vinca minor* 'Gertrude Jekyll', whose white flowers mimic those of *Trachelospermum*. At its widest, near the table, the bed holds bigger plants such as *Nandina domestica*.

Artistic influence

Andy researched Vermeer and felt the artist's colours would make a wonderful palette. So York stone paving provides warm grey tones, complemented by limestone-grey Portland stone copings and buff-painted render. Blues are catered for by *Hydrangea macrophylla* and agapanthus; Vermeer's warm copper-red and wine tones are referenced in the late season foliage of *Hydrangea quercifolia* and *N. domestica* along with earlier flowers of *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Fireglow' and *Angelica gigas*.

The curving wall provides nooks and seating. 'When you stand up you can see over it, but when you sit down it protects you and offers screening,' says Andy. Moreover it makes a feature of what is essentially a path to the studio. He also created an imperceptible slope down the garden towards the studio, rather than by designing in steps. Its level drops overall by 25cm (10in) – this 'sinks' the garden to a lower depth than its neighbours, giving greater intimacy. The tops of the original boundary walls were raised with iroko slats to achieve more privacy.

The site is archaeologically sensitive, which caused some challenges during the build. It was where King Henry VIII built his New Manor House, (also known as Chelsea Palace), which became home to members of his family and various other people of note – the final owner being Sir Hans Sloane who lived there until his death in 1753, soon after which it was demolished.

This is a modern garden in an old part of town, so using clipped yew and box was a deliberate nod to the past – as was Andy's choice of York stone. These materials tie the new to the old, and anchor the garden firmly in place beneath the branches of the ancient *Robinia*. ●



Looking back towards the house (above). The shallow stone steps are interplanted with mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolii*) and echo the curving structures within the garden.

Fragrant climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (below) forms an evergreen wall covering.

