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UP ON THE ROOF

A ROOFTOP TERRACE IN LONDON'S DOCKLANDS HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO MIRROR THE CITYSCAPE THAT SURROUNDS IT, WHILE OFFERING THE PERFECT PLACE TO ENTERTAIN. WORDS BY CAMILLA PHELPS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER BAISTOW AND STEVEN WOOSTER

When Andy Sturgeon was asked by 27-year-old Jerry Beck to come up with a design for a Docklands roof terrace, it was not about creating a retreat from the pressures of urban living. Jerry wanted a space to reflect his lifestyle, not to escape from it – a playground for entertaining and relaxing that was a celebration of the metropolis that surrounded him.

The minimal interior of the tenth-floor apartment gave few clues as to what was expected in terms of exterior style. There was little more than an enormous TV, a beanbag and a table-tennis table; and the only

existing features on the roof – a space about the size of six double garages – were a Jacuzzi and the stairwell.

“Jerry didn’t have a very specific brief,” said Andy. “It was purely about the fact that he worked in the city and wanted somewhere to come back to and relax in, have parties, and hang out with his mates. I am quite used to designing areas that are places to look at rather than to garden in – but Jerry was one of my youngest clients to date and the whole roof terrace was a bit of an indulgence.”

Andy was effectively given carte blanche to come up with a high-rise outdoor fantasy. The biggest influence

ABOVE: THE POOL AND PEBBLE BEACH WERE INSPIRED BY THE RIVER BELOW. OPPOSITE: VERBENA BONARIENSIS, ACHILLEA FILIPENDULINA ‘GOLD PLATE’ AND KNIPHOFIA ‘TORCHBEARER’.







the terrace is being used to its full potential. Andy has avoided a minimal look that could have been too harsh in such an urban garden. Instead, an evergreen backbone is provided by low-growing agaves, phormiums, *Pittosporum tobira* and euphorbias, while four white-stemmed betulas add airy height.

Many roof terraces fall into the pitfall of having lots of features perched around the edge. Andy has circumvented this by creating several interlinked areas, each with a different atmosphere; there are separate zones for entertaining, looking at the view, for relaxing, and for sculpture.

Decking and pebbles of varying sizes curve around the planting and a pool of water – as if mirroring the winding river below. The stairwell

leading on to the roof has been integrated into the design, with stainless steel wires grafted on to it to provide supports for climbers. It has also become part of the simple water feature; on one side of the structure a subtle curtain of water slides down a 2cm-thick pane of glass into a pool.

A low, curving, slatted-timber screen acts as a filter for the wind and also defines a planting area. As a witty homage to the inevitably high wind factor on the roof and to add a splash of colour, three canvases have been stretched over wire frames to look exactly like vivid wind socks permanently extended in a force-nine gale. At night they are lit from underneath and glow like luminous flags. Other lighting is very subtle so as not to distract from the cityscape at night.

A final touch of the unexpected is the campfire: a stone-filled fire pit, surrounded by solid oak seating blocks. In keeping with the concept of an urban bachelor's playground, this fire runs on mains gas and it conveniently relights itself if the flame blows out on a breezy evening. "It really does warm things up," says Andy. "You don't usually find an open fire on a roof and I wanted the garden to have a wow factor. This did the job."

"There is one particular view that sums up the garden – looking across the balcony and seeing water, gravel, planting, the wind socks, the buildings and sky. It has a very good feeling. It's so obviously in the middle of the city, but it feels like a really nice place to hang out."

ABOVE: THE CAMPFIRE ADDS A FLIGHT OF BOY-SCOUT FANTASY TO THE GARDEN. AS WELL AS PROVIDING WARMTH, THE STONE-FILLED FIRE PIT GENERATES A SUBTLE LIGHT SOURCE THAT DOESN'T DISTRACT FROM THE CITY ILLUMINATIONS SEEN IN THE DISTANCE.

FACT FILE

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ROOF GARDENS

BEFORE STARTING OUT

Andy strongly recommends people who are intending to create a roof garden obtain a full report from a qualified surveyor or structural engineer to ascertain whether or not the roof space is viable before any work is undertaken. Depending on the type of changes you envisage making, it may also be necessary to contact your local council to find out whether you will need to obtain planning permission. If any structural alterations are to be made, you may need building regulation approval. Most councils will provide planning and regulation booklets free of charge.



FURTHER READING

Planted

by Andy Sturgeon (Hodder & Stoughton, 1998). A beginner's guide to gardening.

Potted

by Andy Sturgeon (Conran Octopus, 2001). Invests indoor plants with much-needed glamour; a practical guide.

Roof Gardens: History, Design and Construction

by Theodore Osmundson (WW Norton and Company, 1999). An authoritative study for designers and landscape architects.

Architecture Now!

by Philip Jodidio (Taschen, 2001). Examining leading architects and their work.

Modern House

by John Welsh (Phaidon Press, 1999). An inspiring photographic guide to the world's most interesting contemporary houses.

CONTACT

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For further information visit the website at www.andysturgeon.com

CONTRACTORS

Andy Sturgeon used The Garden Builders on Jerry Beck's Docklands roof terrace. They can be contacted at:

The Garden Builders, 259 Munster Road, Fulham, London SW6 6BW. Tel 020 7381 8002, fax 020 7385 2320, www.gardenbuilders.co.uk

Andy also recommends the contractors who made the items below:

Fire pit, Sugg Lighting, Sussex Manor Business Pk, Gatwick Rd, Crawley, W Sussex RH10 9GD. Tel 01293 540111, fax 01293 540114.

Oak cubes, Honeysuckle Bottom Sawmill, Honeysuckle Bottom, Green Dene, East Horsley, Surrey KT24 5PR. Tel and fax 01483 282394, email honeysucklecc@aol.com

Windsocks and all bespoke metalwork, Integrated Metal Solutions, 17b Bakers Court, Paycocke Road, Basildon, Essex SS14 3EH. Tel 01268 534133, fax 01268 534134, email sales@integratedmetalsolutions.com, or visit www.integratedmetalsolutions.com

ROOF GARDENS THROUGH HISTORY

In the 17th century, a two-tiered roof garden was installed on the roof of a Kremlin palace, complete with vast ponds supplied with water from the Moscow River. The future tsar of Russia, Peter the Great (1672-1725), sailed his large fleet of toy ships in these ponds, and it is said that from this he developed his love of sailing and ships.

The Swiss-French modernist architect and design philosopher Le Corbusier included the use of roof gardens in his manifesto 'Five Points Towards a New Architecture', published in *Almanach de l'Architecture Moderne* in 1926. He viewed the roof as an additional room – a space to replace the area lost to the building at ground level, although he was not particularly interested in the planting. ■