

# “We’ve doubled our living space”

Jo and Paul Aylin’s overgrown Wimbledon plot has been cleared to create a **HASSLE-FREE HAVEN**

After a stunning kitchen extension was added to the back of their house, complete with a full wall of glass sliding doors, Jo Aylin and husband Paul realised they couldn’t ignore their problem garden anymore as it was now on full show. “Before the extension was built, we could really only see the garden when the backdoor was open,” says Jo. And the garden itself was fast becoming a no-go zone. The boundary bushes had grown so big they took up most of the space, plus all the decking boards were rotten and dangerous to walk on. “Sitting indoors in our lovely new kitchen and looking out to the garden made us realise something quite drastic was needed,” she adds.

Back when they first moved into the house 17 years ago, the 9m x 6m plot was a tiny patch of grass bordered by boundary hedges, so the couple had it landscaped with decking, a small pond with fish, and two big palm trees. This

worked well for them and son Zeke, and was pretty easy to manage. But over time those hedges encroached on the lawn, and once Paul – a keen cyclist – had squeezed in two sheds to house his cycles, the garden seemed to grow smaller and smaller, until it was a space that simply wasn’t usable anymore.

At the end runs the track for the District tube line, the trains of which could be seen, and heard. “We’d originally planted jasmine climbers to help block the noise, but they grew and eventually took up too much space,” explains Jo.

## DESIGN IDEALS

Although their house is Edwardian, the couple wanted the new garden to match their modern extension and for it to be quiet and calming, and pretty low-maintenance as they both work full-time. “We knew what we wanted the garden to become, but also knew we’d never do it ourselves,” says Jo. “We didn’t have the knowledge, expertise or time.”

They searched online and asked four local designers to pitch, choosing Katerina Kantalis (katerinakantalis.co.uk) as the couple felt she really listened to their thoughts and brought lots of clever ideas to the table. “We really liked the way she took on board what we wanted, but added a why and a how, so we understood what we were asking for and if that was the best option,” explains Jo. “And if it wasn’t, then Katerina came up with lots of other examples that could work better.”

## SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

✓ **ADD A FLOATING BENCH** to a raised bed.

✓ **ERECT A CORNER PERGOLA** to shield seating from prying eyes overhead.

✓ **USE ANY SPARE PAVERS** from your patio to make a path.

## PLANNING THE DREAM

“As a garden designer, it’s great to be able to go in and create something completely new and different, almost from scratch,” says Katerina. Her plan was to bring in urban and contemporary styling to create a smooth transition between indoor and outdoor living and, because the overgrown bushes had attracted loads of birds, it was important that the design would still encourage wildlife. “Jo used the new extension as her office during the day, so it was key to have a sense of calm and tranquillity in the garden,” adds Katerina. “Hence why I also wanted to enlarge the pond and add a fountain for relaxing sound.”

Other needs for the garden were a couple of entertaining areas to make the most of its

BEFORE

From old slippery wooden decking with overgrown planting...

...TO TROPICAL OASIS that is both tranquil and inviting to wildlife.

GARDEN makeover

*Festuca glauca*

*Typha minima*

*Stipa tenuissima*

*Cordyline australis*  
*‘Atropurpurea’*



Jo and Paul's new space is great for two, even better to share!

## OUR GARDEN PLAN

**LOCATION** Wimbledon, London

**THE LOOK** Tropical & wildlife-friendly

**SITE** Size 9m x 6m **Faces** South  
**Soil** London clay

### OUR BUDGET

Hard landscaping **£25,000**  
Fencing **£6,000** Pergola **£700**  
Bike store & shed **£2,000**  
Raised beds & floating benches **£3,500**  
Pond **£800** Planting **£2,200**  
Lighting **£3,500**  
**TOTAL: £43,700**

### HOW LONG IT TOOK

Hard landscaping **3 weeks**  
Fencing **1 week**  
Storage & structures **1 week**  
Lighting installation **1 week**  
Planting **1 week**  
**TOTAL: 7 weeks**

envious south-facing aspect, and Paul wanted a shed – “for his middle-age bloke moments,” laughs Jo – along with a new bike store. They also wanted practical surfaces, no more wooden decking, and definitely no grass as their dogs (Bill the mini schnauzer and Ziggy the mini wire-haired dachshund) would ruin it in minutes!

### PROBLEMS SOLVED

Before the transformation could begin, all the undergrowth needed to be cleared. “We had hoped Katerina and her team would be able to use the passageway at the back of the garden to remove and bring in all the stuff,” says Jo. “But unfortunately a neighbour down the line had extended into it so everything had to come through the house and our lovely new kitchen!” So the garden had to be cleared by hand – no time-saving diggers – and the biggest machine used was a small concrete mixer.

One other headache that presented itself was replacing the pond without flooding the garden. “We had to empty it the old-fashioned way with buckets!” remembers Katerina. But those containers came in handy. “We saved the fish and lots of aquatic plants in buckets for the duration of the project,” she adds.

### OUTLINING THE SPACE

With a tube line running past, privacy was vital, so Katerina suggested going higher with new double-slatted fence panels, which still allow light through. “Fences can't be higher than 6ft, so to make the space more private we topped them with slatted trellis,” explains Katerina, taking advantage of a loophole to make the fence a smidge higher, as most local authorities allow trellis up to 2m.

Within this cocooned space, a mix of flooring was laid to help distinguish the different areas. Porcelain planks positioned in gravel lead to the entertaining area complete with clay tiles in a herringbone pattern, built-in benching, large firepit and corner pergola. Outside the kitchen



Fancy a new firepit? Turn to p37

GOOD IDEA!

Camouflage storage by constructing it from fencing slats

Phormium  
Maori Queen



PET-FRIENDLY composite decking gets a round of a-paws!

FLOATING BENCHES add a second seating area for cosy gatherings around the firepit.

### CLEVER PLANTING

Jo and Paul wanted to keep the existing hardy palm tree and cordyline, so the other plants needed to fit in with these, and also encourage birds and wildlife. “Katerina produced a mini booklet of all the suitable plants and shrubs in our chosen colour scheme of white, green and purple,” says Jo.

And from this low-maintenance pick and mix of plants, the couple chose an inviting array of foliage such as *Heuchera* ‘Plum Pudding’ and *Stipa tenuissima* alongside easy-going blooms including *Clematis montana* and *Salvia nemerosa*. As it was a mild winter, some went into the ground straight away, with Katerina

returning to finish the planting and add a few more pops of purple the following spring.

As the planting matured, so the couple used their garden more and more. “The transformation has been amazing from a no-go zone to alfresco central!” says Jo. “Whenever it's dry and warm enough we move outside and enjoy breakfast and lunch out there at weekends and have people round for dinner all the time.”

It's also a space for hobbies and doing nothing. Jo loves sketching and reading while Paul, a keen photographer, uses the garden as a backdrop. Grown-up son Zeke loves the firepit and this is where he and his friends like to hang out. “Sitting on the benches under the

## GARDEN MAKEOVER

A GLOWY GARDEN IS the perfect place for a glass of wine on a late-summer evening.



### Katerina's tips for a small outdoor space

- No matter how small the plot, plan ‘rooms’ such as dining, entertaining and functional to make the most of it.
- Introduce height to draw your eye up and see the whole garden, otherwise you'll naturally look from ground to mid-level and only see half of the space.
- Use a maximum of three different flooring types or it looks too busy, but don't be afraid of using pattern as a statement piece.
- Limit your planting palette and instead look for a range of shapes and scales.

pergola, we can see the whole garden and also back indoors,” says Jo. “The wired-in lights underneath the palms, the blaze from the firepit and the trickling of the fountain make it into such a relaxing space. But the best thing of all is being able to actually use the garden – it's our outside space to enjoy with our friends,” she smiles.

## HOW WE DID IT...



**1 THE HUGE HEDGES** and overgrown shrubs have been dug out and the ground cleared, creating so much more space.



**2 THERE'S NOW ACCESS** to remove the dilapidated fences, along with the old sheds in the corner. But the palm trees are safe!



**3 UP GOES THE STYLISH SLATTED** fencing, and raised beds are built from breeze-blocks. Time for a tea break!



**4 A NEW SHED IS INSTALLED** and the herringbone floor for the entertaining area starts to take shape.



**5 MORE FLOORING IS LAID** by the hard-working team, all watched by passengers on the District line!



**6 WITH BEDS RENDERED** and floating benches and pond installed, gravel and cobbles are added, and it's just the plants left to go in.