

“It’s such a bright and positive place to be”

Striking shapes and **SUNNY TONES** have lifted Sarah and Jon Martin’s compact East London plot from dull to dazzling

A striking sculpture was the catalyst for change in this modern, multilayered space. “The sculpture is quite large, so I really wanted to show it off outside,” says Sarah, “but not with the garden the way it was!” Sarah and Jon had lived in their 1980s detached house for 15 years without doing much to their outside space other than mow the lawn. “The garden had been a boring standard rectangle for years with just a lawn and some old decking,” Sarah says. “We did use it but not much, and it was just functional really.”

The arrival of the sculpture was the prompt the couple needed to overhaul their neglected back garden. Created by Zimbabwean sculptor Edmore Sango, it was taking up space in the conservatory where it couldn’t be enjoyed as much as Sarah had hoped. “I already had one of his sculptures, bought when my parents died as a memorial to them,” she says. “And then I found this one at an art fair in Surrey and loved it! I was keen to find somewhere special to showcase it.”

TIME FOR A CHANGE

Sarah and Jon began a search for a garden designer and were drawn to the work of Katrina Kieffer-Wells of Earth Designs (earthdesigns.co.uk). “We didn’t really have a brief for her as we had no idea what to do with the space!” says Sarah. “I was thinking of having the whole area paved, but Katrina had some great ideas. She was really clever at picking out clues from within our home when she came to visit and translating these into a design for the garden. There’s a cactus in the conservatory in a bright yellow pot and I think she used that as inspiration for the planters in the garden.”

The couple’s grown-up children had recently left home, so there were few restraints on how the plot could be transformed. Their brief asked for a modern, accessible garden with space to entertain. “The couple wanted to have interesting things to look at, having endured years of a blank and boring space,” says Katrina. “When I visited, the garden contained very little interest. The owners had lived here for many years and were keen to remodel the space into something more exciting and aesthetically pleasing.”

A FEAST FOR THE EYES

Katrina set about filling the space with unusual angles, bright containers and plants with striking leaf shapes to create different levels and textures throughout. A zesty yellow became the defining colour. “We used two statement fibreglass planters and tropical-style planting to fill the space with touches of yellow year-round,” she explains.

Patterns add life to the plot, too, and a bistro table with a monotone geometric print was chosen to sit next to the conservatory where the morning sun falls, with a yellow mesh-moulded chair adding further texture alongside the black metal benches. To maximise the feeling of space, a raised hardwood decking walkway and porcelain tiles were laid at a 45-degree angle to the house.

Initially the plans included a decorative Corten steel panel, but Sarah and Jon weren’t keen to divide the small plot. Instead the panel breaks up a large bland brick wall. “A leak from the guttering had left a grubby mark on the bricks, so the panel not only makes a feature of a once boring wall but covers that up,” explains Sarah.

Sarah and Jon chose the yellow tone for the Perspex panel that sits behind the screen and also the pattern for the steel screen. “We’re really pleased with it,” says Sarah.

Corten steel was also used for the large firepit in the centre of the main seating area. “We’ve since realised that we’re not really ‘sit around the fire’ sort of people!” laughs Sarah. “So we now use the surround as a table, and I’ve planted up the firepit itself with some lovely succulents as a centrepiece.”



READER GARDEN

GARDEN makeover

SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

- ✓ **LAY A DIAGONAL PATH** or raised walkway across part of your garden.
- ✓ **TREAT YOURSELF TO A FIBERGLASS CUBE PLANTER** – they’re lightweight, durable and come in lots of modern colours.
- ✓ **ADD A SCULPTURE TO A FLOWERBED.** Have a go at making your own from wire, concrete, wood or upcycled items.

“On a sunny day, we enjoy the amazing shadows of the leaf shapes against the fence”



The garden is now much more useable for the Martin family

OUR GARDEN PLAN

LOCATION

Woodford, East London

THE LOOK

Colourful and modern

SITE

Size 15 x 7m Faces South-west Soil Clay

OUR BUDGET

Clearance & preparation **£1,230**
 Porcelain paving **£8,506**
 Decking **£2,896**
 Fences **£2,371**
 Shed **£1,453**
 Corten steel screen **£1,030**
 Planting **£3,248**
 Lighting **£1,982**
 Firepit **£718**
TOTAL: £23,434

HOW LONG IT TOOK

Clearance & preparation **3 days**
 Paving & decking **1 week**
 Planting **2 days**
 Installing storage unit **1 day**
 Lighting **1 day**
 Installing fencing, screen & firepit **2 days**
TOTAL: 3 WEEKS

BUTTERY BLOOMS

Low maintenance was a key consideration. “The clients were keen to dispense with the lawn entirely,” says Katrina. Raised beds now house a mix of easy-care plants with dramatic leaf shapes and warm-hued blooms. The showstopper blooms of red hot poker ‘Bees Lemon’ and *Rudbeckia deamii* shine above a haze of delicate copper-coloured *Epimedium* ‘Ellen Willmott’ and golden *Crocsmia* ‘Buttercup’. Clematis ‘Bill MacKenzie’ and winter jasmine carry the yellow tones upwards, while a Chinese banana (*Musa lasiocarpa*) brings incredible rosettes of custard-coloured bracts in summer. “We’ve never really been keen gardeners and we just kept it tidy, but now we’re getting more interested in the planting,” says Sarah. “We were given plenty of advice on how to look after the plants and there are lots of flowers mid to late summer now, all of them yellow. The green foliage is fantastic, too, especially after rain when it all looks so fresh. Jon really enjoys seeing the banana leaves grow, and it’s amazing how quickly they do grow, within just three weeks they were huge!”

“We’re really happy with the architectural nature of the planting,” Sarah continues. “On a sunny day or, in the evening when the garden is lit up, we enjoy the amazing shadows of the leaf shapes against the fence.”

SHINING SUCCESS

The updated space now sees a lot more use. “We enjoy the garden so much more, we’re outside far more often, sometimes just to sit and read or even work,” says Sarah. “We can move around the garden with the sun throughout the day, and we recently added some lighting around the table next to the house as we sit out there on warm evenings. The garden is so much more interesting as the different levels and angles mean there is something to look at all the time, and we love the yellow. It’s such a striking and positive colour. The redesign has made it all more useable and a space that I’m proud to share with my family and friends.”



Epimedium
‘Ellen Willmott’



Red hot poker
‘Bees Lemon’



Crocsmia
‘Buttercup’

THE PLANTING is designed to spill over the edges and add texture.

POTS OF SPIKY zebra plants on a patterned table are a striking combination.



The tired and weathered decking was looking pretty sorry for itself

BEFORE

Plant a striking phormium in your plot, turn to p70

Simply stylish

THE SQUARE Corten steel firepit will only look better with age.

GEOMETRIC GENIUS

Bold patterns and strong leaf shapes give this compact plot character all year round

THE LONG pointed leaves of a cordyline create a simple but bold display.

Get the look!



1



2



3

- 1 Spring Arm Chair – Yellow, £119.60 officesupermarket.co.uk
- 2 *Musa lasiocarpa*, £45/24cm pot kaleidoscope.co.uk
- 3 Larbre Corten Metal Screen, £240 screenwithenvy.co.uk
- 4 Glendale Scatter Cushions, £39.99/4 qubox.co.uk
- 5 Adezz Corten Steel Square Fire Table, £589 alfrescoheat.co.uk

5

4

SPOTLIGHT spikes highlight the dramatic leaf shape of a Chusan palm.