



DECADENT LIVING Tree ferns and banana plants set the tone in this style-conscious garden. Left to right from the silver senecio 'Angel Wings' are pink achillea with stachys behind, Japanese anemone with gold carex in front. Blue agapanthus and white lavender are just across the boardwalk

"It's not just one outdoor room - it's two"

This glamorous modern garden marries architectural planting with pops of bold colour. Designer Katrina Kieffer-Wells tells its story



IN THE GARDEN WITH...

John Lear and Anthony Rafferty

AT Leigh-On-Sea, Essex
GARDEN SIZE 18x6m (59x19ft)
SITE West-facing
SOIL Heavy clay
FEATURES Decking platforms and boardwalk through small suburban garden; architectural planting; Moroccan-style tiled fishpond and water feature; 'Riffraffs' cocktail bar; grey fences with pink accent planting and seating
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BEFORE

Having a small garden needn't rule out the wow factor. In fact, if anything, a small garden gives you more opportunity for drama – helping you to channel all your efforts and budget into creating one exciting, immersive experience. This inviting garden in Essex is a case in point.

"The clients are good friends of mine," says its designer, Katrina Kieffer-Wells. "I did this design for them as a wedding present. They initially asked me to simply revive what was already there – a scruffy lawn and decking – but I managed to persuade them to remove the lawn altogether. You just don't need grass in a small garden like this; it requires too much maintenance and storage space for the mower."

The couple wanted to create their own pub in the brick outbuilding at the far end of the garden. "But then, we went down there and the building was so manky I asked them to think about whether they

"You don't need grass in a small garden; it requires too much maintenance"

really wanted to use it. They rethought the idea and eventually replaced it with a large wooden summerhouse that they've turned into a tropical-themed cocktail bar call Riffraffs.

"They'd also inherited a big carp pond with a pergola over the top to protect the fish from herons," says Katrina.

SHAPE & FORM (clockwise from above left) A raised boardwalk connects the two seating areas; architectural planting around the carp pond includes a banana and swathes of candy-pink achillea; agapanthus and leucanthemum; ferns and *Senecio candidans* 'Angel Wings' glow against the dark grey fencing



FEATURE: LIZ POTTER; PHOTOS: ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT



“It looked as though it had landed there from outer space and made the area really dark, so we had to find a way to integrate and soften it, using plants around the front so it looked less bulky. We rendered the brick, painted it green and laid tiles on top. The sides might be high but they’re the perfect height for perching on. A couple of pink acapulco chairs add a pop of colour that’s picked up in the planting.”

In the end the design became more about managing the route through the garden from one end to the other. “We removed the existing grass and stepping stones to create a more attractive



The new boardwalk allows you to walk above the plants for a more elevated view

ATTENTION TO DETAIL (clockwise from top) Cocktails are served in Riffraffs, the new wooden summerhouse; the existing carp pond was revitalised and softened with tiles and planting; a statement cordyline among a sea of ferns; white lavender provides fragrant edging for the raised boardwalk, with a corten steel fire globe for cosy summer evenings

journey,” says Katrina. “There was a steep, sudden flight of steps down from the decking to the grass that we changed in favour of a long raised boardwalk from one end of the garden to the other, so there was a more staggered level change. The new boardwalk is made from yellow balau hardwood and allows you to walk above the plants for a more elevated view.”

Katrina’s team replaced the fence and painted the new one Urban Slate from Cuprinol. “Dark fences create a bit of designer glamour and provide the perfect





“*Dark fences create a bit of glamour and provide a perfect backdrop for plants*”

backdrop for the plants,” she says. “We’ve added large sheets of perspex for a more attractive finish in places where you’re sitting close to it – like a feature wall – and trellis on top gives added privacy at eye level.”

The planting is all about textures and leaf shapes. “We’ve contrasted rough and smooth, soft and spiky,” says Katrina. “John likes a bit of gardening and was very keen on architectural foliage – so we’ve got tree ferns, trachycarpus and banana plants in the mix. There are a few flowers too – chosen for their bold shape and colour, with pops of pink from achillea,

hylothelephium and Japanese anemones.”

Other exciting textures are provided by cryptomeria, ferns and fleshy trailing sedum, with red phormium, gold carex and silver stachys for additional layers of foliage colour.

“John’s a head teacher and likes to sit and do his marking in the garden now,” says Katrina. “I don’t think they’d be as keen on using the garden if it was still just grass to look at. Ant works as a physiotherapist and was a keyworker on the front line during the first lockdown, so the garden was a godsend – a real sanctuary and a space they could both escape to. I think they entertain more down in the cocktail bar than they do in the house!

“By having two different seating areas to choose from, they can enjoy two different views of the garden,” says Katrina. “In effect, making over the garden has given John and Ant not just one outdoor room, but two.” 🌱



TACTILE PLANTING (clockwise from top) To address the incline of the garden, the raised boardwalk subtly changes levels; golden carex and Japanese anemones offer different leaf shapes; cryptomeria with white echinaceas, blue agapanthus, strappy iris foliage and liriop **ABOVE** Pink acapulco chairs create a colour pop against the fence, painted in Urban Slate