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CREATING THE ILLUSION SPACE

Minimalist garden design, maximum space and a little magic

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BETTER PERSPECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY**



Earth Designs deliver a master class in the illusion of simplicity in this Chelmsford family garden design. Many urban homes in the UK have similar outdoor spaces. Plots are designed to give everyone a similar slice of the outdoors, so they tend to be rectangular or square. Depending on where you live, however, few surpass 100 square metres and most inner city or new builds are only half that size. It can be challenging to imagine how to bring your own small rectangle of earth to life, especially when its an unusual shape or dimensions.

The plot in Chelmsford is unusual in that it is wide, but not particularly deep. The outdoor area spans the back of the house and new folding doors and windows have been installed at intervals. These either look or lead out onto the space, which provides a full, panoramic view of the garden from inside.

The owners had spent a considerable

amount of care renovating the interior and by contrast the family garden had begun to look a little tired. What they needed was a smart new garden to match the elegant modern interior and they called in Kat and Matt from Earth Designs to tackle the job.

As it was

Before the revamp, the existing outdoor space resembled many a family garden up-and-down the country. Consisting of a shed, a slightly unkempt lawn and an overgrown side-return. There was a raised seating area and a mishmash of leftover textures and materials from various periods of the garden's lifespan. And at that time, the view from the house was dominated by the brick wall that constituted the rear boundary.

The clients wanted a clean-lined, modern space, with areas for entertaining and relaxation. But it also needed to function as a family garden, which meant making ample lawn provision for footballers in the family!



Earth Design's challenge would be to create a new 180° view and functional family space, all wrapped-up in a minimalist, modern look.

Diagonal dreams

The first design objective was to make the garden appear deeper and to do that Earth →

Designs employed the old diagonal trick.

This meant turning the whole design on a 45° angle. Immediately this creates an optical illusion, making the garden look deeper than it is. The new layout divides the garden into two new lawns in triangular sections pointed away from the house. This has the effect of creating a vanishing point moving away from the house. It also creates negative space at the rear and side boundaries of the new lawn areas that are ideal for deep beds or borders. Because they are also triangular there is room for tiered planting which gradually becomes taller, softening the view of the wall and fences behind.

Between the two lawn areas a thin line of sandstone cuts through the grass, like the Meridian Line in Greenwich. This striking and unexpected design detail adds to the illusion of depth.

Introducing a 'near' and 'far' element to the garden view culminates in a handsome silver birch in the distant far corner. Grass meets stone again in the form of a neat, narrow patio that sits at the threshold between house and garden. Only wide enough to accommodate a small table and chairs, it makes the ideal perch for morning coffee, paper reading (or phone scrolling) or a moment of alone time.

With a richly textured landscape stretching out before you, lawns and sandstone are like a mountain range of stone and grass.

On your left, another patio cuts into the first, zigzagging away into the far left corner. Bright coloured dining furniture contrasts against the pale grey paving and stunning red acers in large pots draw the eye, standing out against the green and purple planting.

The old raised seating area has become a raised bed, edged with railway sleepers and neat hedgerows border the dining space. The side return has been paved too and the space has been transformed. Clearing out and



'It can be challenging to imagine how to bring your own small rectangle of earth to life, especially when its an unusual shape or dimensions'



opening up this space has sent light flooding into the side of the house, providing a bright roomy walkway with ample, easy access to the garden.

Materials, minimalism and a touch of magic

At first glance, this garden may look simple, but in many ways the minimalist look is the hardest to pull off, because there is nowhere to hide. The garden is trim and tidy, but full of colour and texture. Opposing finishes like smooth sandstone, rough timber and soft planting butt up against each other. Hard edges meet plump hedgerows and downy beds. Radiant green foliage contrasts against ruby and violet floral displays. And each layer adds to the next to create a sense of depth and overall feeling of space.

Amazingly, the garden looks twice as big

as it did before, yet the square footage is exactly the same. Clear boundaries make sure every member of the family has the freedom to use the garden without infringing on each other's space. There is plenty of room for football, for instance, but the raised beds keep the ball in play, rather than in the dining area, or over the wall. There is also room to come together as a family in the dining spaces and seating areas.

The simplistic nature of the design is a carefully constructed illusion. Earth Designs have, created a wide, open modern landscape with inviting spaces and attention to detail. They have seemingly achieved the impossible, by designing a space that is practical, stylish, but also family friendly. Magic!

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