

# COOL AND CALM

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PHOTOGRAPHS: Richard Bloom

Pre-registered member John Davies' rich tapestry of plants for this pocket garden in north London has not only given the new kitchen-dining room a gloriously natural setting, it has turned its owner into an enthusiastic gardener



When John first saw this 68-square-metre garden behind a Victorian house in north London, there was no planting of any merit in it. It was completely decked and had an ugly blockwork back wall. His first thought was to remove the wall and replace it with something more sympathetic, but when the client said she had contacted Adam Shepherd of Tapestry Vertical Gardens as she wanted a green wall, John and Adam began another of their many collaborations. They have worked together for a long time and Adam's hydroponic walls offer an evergreen solution with seasonal impact.

'What we do is make sure that there are a number of the same or similar varieties in the wall and ground-level planting schemes,' says Adam. Among the key plants that feature on this garden's horizontal and vertical planes are *Geranium 'Roseanne'*, *Persicaria amplexicaulis 'Rosea'*, ferns and *Soleirolia soleirolii*.

#### Childhood memories

The client had grown up in the countryside and wanted to have as much planting as possible in the garden, which is essentially a foil to a newly built kitchen-dining room. With bi-fold doors on two sides of the new extension, the client wanted the garden and the interior to feel intimately connected. John's aim, therefore, was to bring the plants and house as close together as possible and yet make sure there is a natural way to circulate around the outside space. He was also asked to create a spot that could be used for relaxed seating.

'I and the client spent a great deal of time looking at options for a beige-coloured stone paving,' John recalls. 'The Jura beige stone that we eventually specified from London Stone has a high degree of variation, which increases the visual interest in the garden.'



#### John Davies

is a pre-registered SGD member. Formerly an opera singer, he worked in arts administration before he retrained as a garden designer at the London College of Garden Design in 2010, delighting in the fact that his second career is even more vocational and satisfying than his onstage work. [johndavieslandscape.co.uk](http:// johndavieslandscape.co.uk)

A-Rise145 asymmetric circular in-ground spotlights by FLOS, sourced from Atrium, are set at ground level and angled for maximum effect; where they light the green wall, the spots are positioned 600mm away from the frame so new growth does not block the light from the top of the feature.

The ground-planted area covers approximately half of the entire outdoor space, at 39 square metres. The site is an awkward shape, consisting of a rectangular bed just outside the new extension and a T-shaped border opposite, and John's intention was to make what is in effect an interrupted square feel resolved. The solution was to run the green wall across the full width of the garden, making it visible from all angles and effectively stitching the space together, and to draw the focus in closer and enhance the effect yet further, the plants have been set into a timber-slatted 'picture' frame fitted with a hydroponic system.

The garden is fortunately positioned so that it basks in a mixture of sunlight and shade. Both the south-facing green wall and T-shaped bed enjoy a good dose of the former, while the rectangular bed closer to the house is more or less in shade, so John chose to use a form of woodland planting for the beds – 'I think of London gardens, many of which are shaded by walls, fences and neighbouring trees, as being on the woodland edge,' he explains.

*Acer griseum*, with its seasonal foliage and year-round exfoliating bark, stands in the centre of the T-shaped bed and beneath it, the design includes ferns such as *Polystichum setiferum*, and other shade-tolerating plants, among them *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, *Tricyrtis formosana 'Dark Beauty'*, *Epimedium x versicolour 'Sulphureum'* and the grass *Melica altissima 'Alba'*.

#### Rhythmic planting

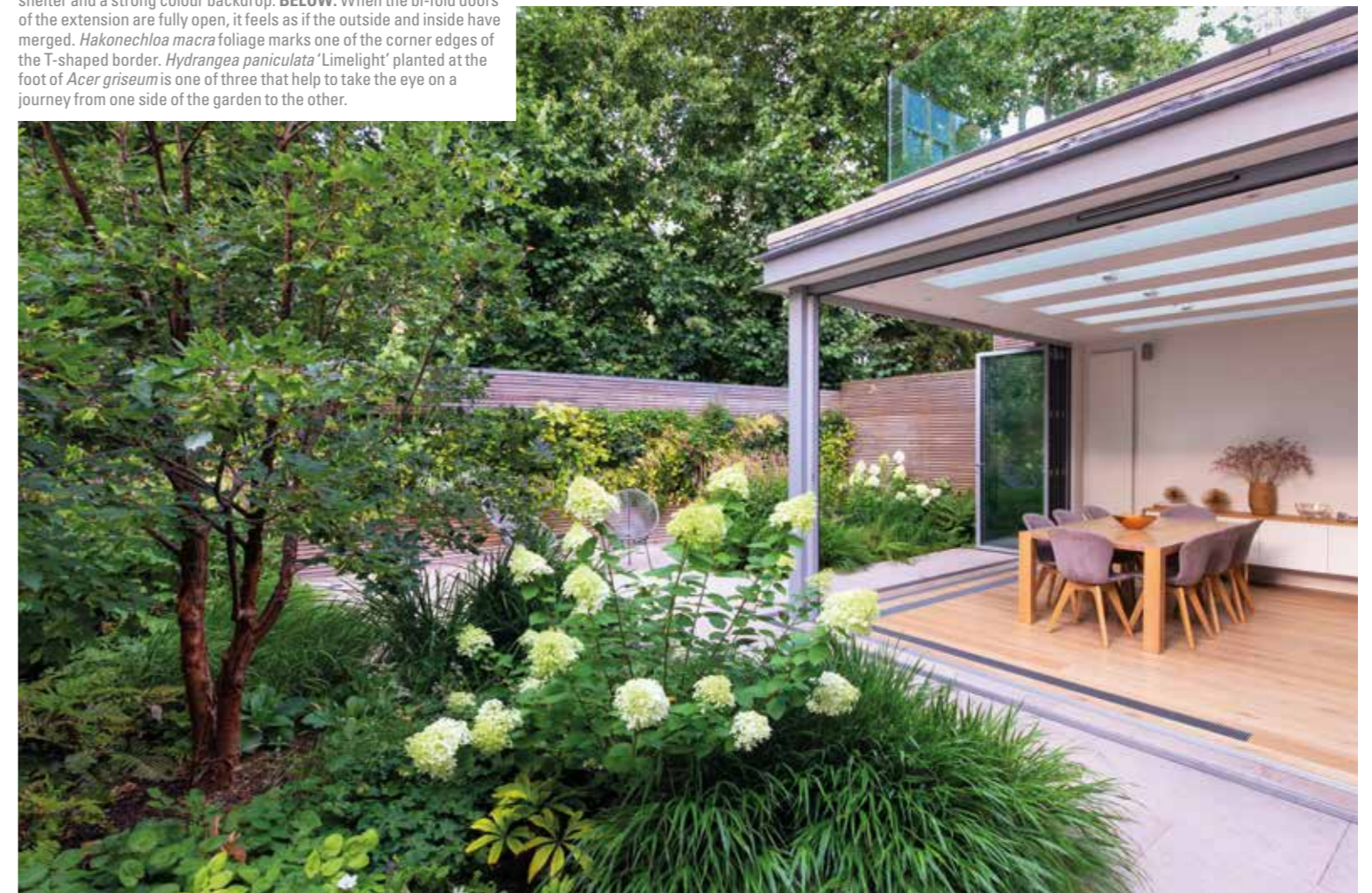
To unify the planted areas, John has used three specimens of *Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'* across the beds, offering a rhythmic effect. 'I haven't used many plants in the design as I think a limited palette with a repetition of some individual plants creates a restful space in this small urban garden.'

As well as being mindful of sun and shade, his aim has been to extend the seasonality of the planting and to avoid any one climax, suggesting it is better to have the →

PREVIOUS PAGE: Agapanthus is one of the green wall staples. BELOW, FROM TOP *Polystichum setiferum* Divisiolobum Group 'Herrenhausen' is one of the many shade-loving plants within the two borders, planted with *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and near to one of the *Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'* planted against the wall; *Rodgersia aesculifolia* is used in both beds for its shapely and colourful foliage; *Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus'* is another green wall staple.



ABOVE: The garden is bounded by a slatted Western red cedar wall built on site by The Garden Builders. *Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus'* is one of the key plants that Adam Shepherd uses in his green walls. Here, it makes a strong edging to one side of the green wall. Toning blue-coloured Acapulco chairs are placed to take full advantage of the sun and planting. Beyond the slatted wall, a stand of lime trees offers shelter and a strong colour backdrop. BELOW: When the bi-fold doors of the extension are fully open, it feels as if the outside and inside have merged. *Hakonechloa macra* foliage marks one of the corner edges of the T-shaped border. *Hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight'* planted at the foot of *Acer griseum* is one of three that help to take the eye on a journey from one side of the garden to the other.





## WHO'S WHO

Hydroponic green wall, Tapestry Vertical Gardens, [tapestryverticalgardens.com](http://tapestryverticalgardens.com)

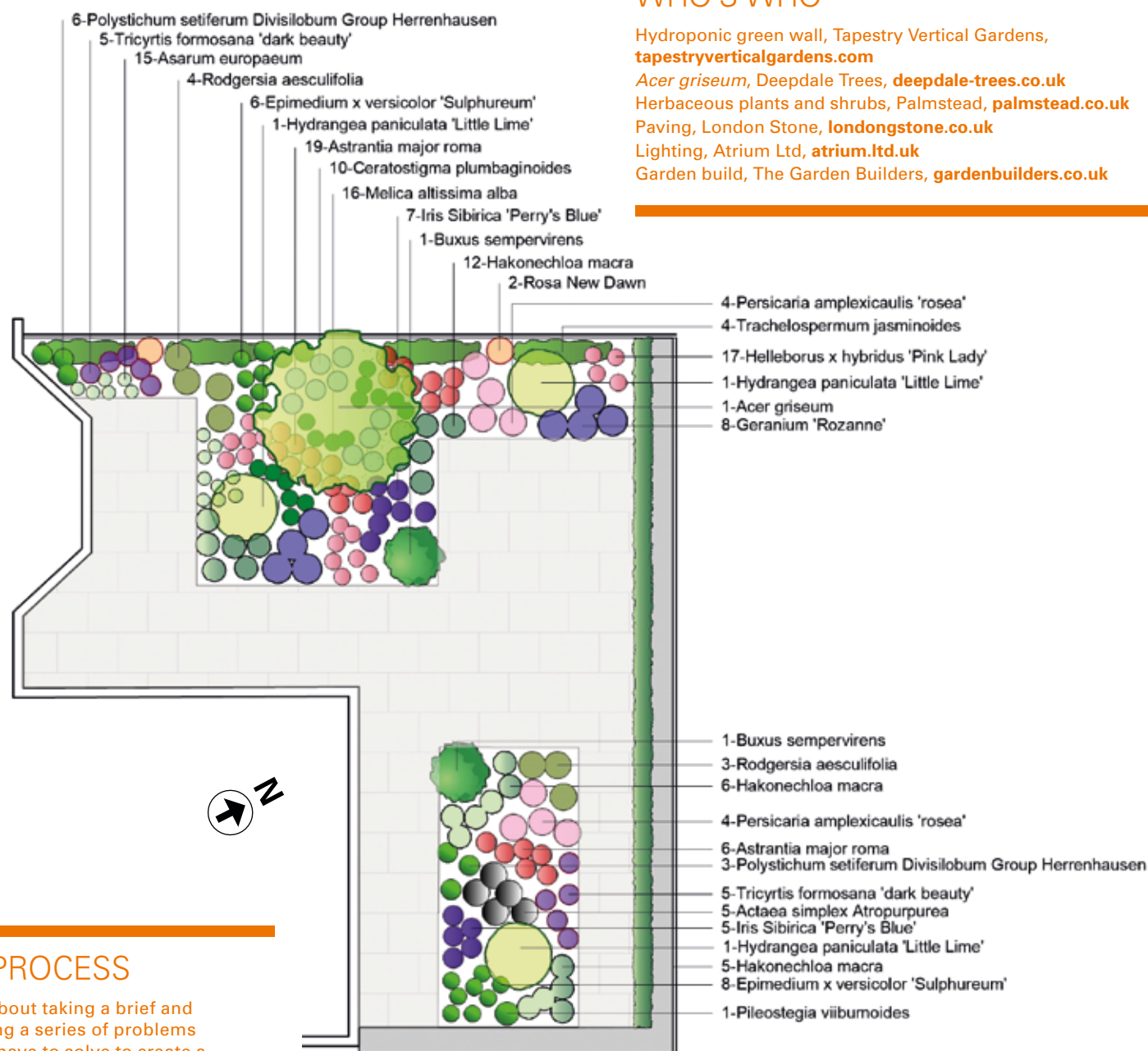
*Acer griseum*, Deepdale Trees, [deepdale-trees.co.uk](http://deepdale-trees.co.uk)

Herbaceous plants and shrubs, Palmstead, [palmstead.co.uk](http://palmstead.co.uk)

Paving, London Stone, [londongstone.co.uk](http://londongstone.co.uk)

Lighting, Atrium Ltd, [atrium.ltd.uk](http://atrium.ltd.uk)

Garden build, The Garden Builders, [gardenbuilders.co.uk](http://gardenbuilders.co.uk)



## THE PROCESS

'It is all about taking a brief and identifying a series of problems that you have to solve to create a beautiful space,' says John of his working process. 'This leads to the identification of a concept which, in this case, is about bringing nature to the city.' Having identified the idea, the designer then looks at the architecture of the space and explores the relationship between mass and void, beginning to trace a spatial narrative throughout the design. It always starts with pen and paper, he says, but often moves swiftly into three-dimensional development, to test initial ideas. 'This process seems to be a far cry from planting but in many ways, it is entirely a preparation for the most important of all the elements, the plants which one hopes will then be set to take pride of place within the overall design.'

effects unfolding over a longer period and deferring the high points. 'I think it is satisfying to wait for the big plant moments throughout the seasons, rather than experiencing everything at once.'

### Unrestricted roots

One of the things that makes the planting in the green wall so exciting is its capacity to grow larger shrubs, a situation made possible because the roots are not restricted by finite pockets. On the other hand, as there is less room for growth, they will not reach full size and effectively become bonsai-ed.

The green wall is a treasure trove of shrubs such as fuchsias and *Tetrapanax papyferum*, as well as herbaceous material including *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, ferns and the wide-creeping *Soleirolia soleirolii*. It even features exciting seasonal touches such as hollyhocks that reach for the sky from the wall, offering a rustic country cottage look, while agapanthus provide late summer flowers.

The variety of growth means that the client has come to enjoy pruning and tending the planted wall. 'Our client wasn't a gardener before but has become one in this new garden. You can't ask for more than to design a garden and set alight someone's passion for plants,' says John. ○