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# GARDENS

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## *Spectacular* Small gardens

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The hard landscaping subtly complements the greens, with paths of crushed granite and steps of basalt.



High walls clad in hardwood slats and a veil of arching green tree fern fronds give the garden a sense of peace and seclusion.



The bold, minimal planting comprises tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) with grass (*Hakonechloa macra*) and box balls (*Buxus sempervirens*), while climbing hydrangeas (*H. petiolaris*) have begun to scale the fences. Snowdrops bloom among the box in winter.

# Sanctuary in the city

A lush, green oasis that looks vibrant whatever the season, needs hardly any looking after, and finds room for a play area – what more could you ask for?

WORDS JOE PONTIN PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

Designer Tom Stuart-Smith is used to working on a large scale – if you have visited RHS Wisley in Surrey recently you may have explored his six-acre landscape around the Bicentenary Glasshouse.

So the small London garden of a professional couple presented a very different challenge. With a dream brief to “create something exceptional”, Tom set out to make nothing less than what he calls “another world”.

Using just five kinds of plant – tree ferns, box, grass and climbing hydrangeas, with snowdrops for late winter – he has created a remarkable, easily maintained garden that looks inviting from the house all year round.

The key to planting in small spaces, according to Tom, is to limit the planting palette. “Don’t use too much colour, concentrate on texture and form and create

depth.” The result in this garden is a green and restful space in which the graceful fronds of the tree ferns sway gently in the wind.

In the relatively mild London climate the tree ferns are evergreen and, like the grass and box, they look vibrant in all seasons.

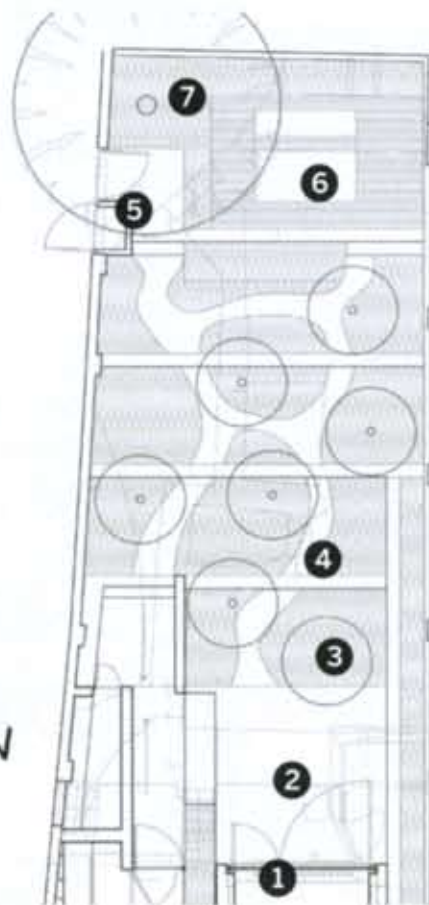
Tom stresses that the space isn’t simply a striking composition but is “an exploratory garden”, a reference both to its capacity to lure you out of the house, and to its surprising, discreet play area, which includes a sandpit for the owners’ young children. This garden is that rare thing: beauty and utility in harmony. □

- For more information about Tom Stuart-Smith go to [www.tomstuartsmith.co.uk](http://www.tomstuartsmith.co.uk)
- *Planting Paradise: The Gardens of Tom Stuart-Smith* continues until 29 August at the Garden Museum in London. Tel 020 7401 8865, [www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk)



Large windows look out from the house to the garden and terrace in polished concrete, with chairs by Paola Lenti.

- 1 House
- 2 Terrace
- 3 Tree fern
- 4 Gravel path
- 5 Bin store
- 6 Sandpit
- 7 Cherry tree



PLAN BY TOM STUART-SMITH

## Key elements

WHAT Family home.  
 WHERE London.  
 SIZE 18.5m by 8.5m.  
 SOIL London clay, improved using sand and compost.  
 SPECIAL FEATURES Simple, low-maintenance planting for year-round impact; discreet play area for children.  
 MADE BY Designer Tom Stuart-Smith, contractor Crocus.