

Simply stunning

In a London garden, designer Charlotte Rowe has created a subtly sophisticated garden using a simple palette of green and white

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In brief

What Modern private garden.

Where Southwest London.

Points of interest Clever, semi-sunken dining area. High terrace with water. Mainly flower-free planting.

Size 1,000 square metres.

Climate Sheltered and urban.

Soil Clay with some sand.

Hardiness rating USDA 8a-9b.

What was once merely a neglected lawn surrounded by sorry shrubs has been transformed into a creatively planned urban space, with well-defined areas to eat, sit and relax or even play pétanque.



Anyone recognise what type of trees these are?

Left Although Charlotte has allowed some flowers into this largely evergreen garden, she has limited them to a single border and single colour, and continued the clean, sharp lines with clipped box hedging around fastigate trees.

Below left The sophisticated white of *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' adds a delicate beauty to the formality of the single flower border.

Below right Box hedging creates two steps that link staircases on either side of the upper terrace.

Some gardens are full of fireworks. Long enticing borders crammed with crescendoes of colour, tangles of texture and swaths of scent. Others are more restrained and get their power from their simplicity and architecture. It is the difference between Carmen Miranda (all flounce and zagadoodle) and the quiet sophistication of a Hungarian diplomat. This garden in Wimbledon, southwest London, falls very firmly into the second camp.

It was designed by Charlotte Rowe who changed career about eight years ago (her previous life was all fearfully high powered and involved PR and Ken Livingstone) and since then has completed more than 170 gardens including a Gold Medal winning show garden for the Army Benevolent Fund at this year's Chelsea Flower Show. When she first clapped eyes on this garden it had "an awful lot of large shrubs gathered around a dreary lawn upon which sat, in pride of

place, a rotary clothes line". Charlotte's clients, however, had very distinct ideas about what they wanted: "strong rectangular geometry, lots of clipped stuff and a very limited palette of plants".

The first task was to try and formalise the rather random boundaries – "I designed a central rectangular lawn that regularised the layout of the site" – and come up with the solution to the serious drop in levels. The terrace outside the house is elevated about 1.2m above the rest of the garden which gives it a rather majestic and theatrical feel. From here there are a series of elegant steps: two sets of beautifully lit limestone stairs, a rill that cascades down a polished granite water wall and a razor cut series of stepped hedges in yew and box: all of which deliver you safely to the lawn.

To your left is a sunken sitting area, which is Charlotte's favourite part of the garden. Beneath a slatted cedar roof is a log fire surrounded



Lighting

Charlotte uses lighting in her gardens to create beautiful and subtle effects. "Layering is really important," she says, "and it is better to light hard landscape features – steps, water, columns etc – rather than plants, which just grow and obscure the effect." The exception is trees, which always light well provided the canopy is not too thick. Yews and box are difficult as the light gets absorbed by the sheer number of leaves. For more advice on garden lighting see page 90.

by deep, comfortable sofas. "The fireplace design is one that we have perfected and use quite a lot," explains Charlotte. "We have just the right amount of draw to make sure that the fire blazes merrily without smoke blowing around." She is good on bespoke and also designed the cushions and some very striking tall pots that form a great view from the orangery and also fill a dead space beside the house very effectively.

Further on is a full-sized pétanque terrain between two rows of multi stemmed *Amelanchier* and a row of pleached hornbeams that separate off the back part of the garden. This contains a painted summerhouse (rescued from the original garden and jazzed up) and an echo of the rill that we first met on the terrace: a long streak of matching granite ending in a handsome monolith.

All through the planting is restrained – a glorious agglomeration of clipped box, *Hakonechloa* and laurel by the sunken seating area, ▷

Above left This clever sunken terrace, with its cedar-slatted roof, provides an intimate sheltered space in which the family can relax. Charlotte's clever design for a fireplace and comfortable sofas means they can make use of it even on cooler evenings.

Above right Charlotte has restricted flowers to a limited selection of white perennials, including the pretty *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert'.

Right Rounded mounds of laurel and box provide a rich backdrop for the sheltered seating area, and separate it from the full-sized pétanque terrain. Three pairs of multi-stemmed amelanchiers give this area a Parisian feel, albeit with a contemporary English twist.





A line of pleached hornbeam echoes the neat lines found throughout Charlotte's design and creates an elegant screen that defines the end of the garden.

Left Plantings of *Pachysandra terminalis* provide sophisticated groundcover.



▷ rosemary and box on the terrace – there is one bed which has flowers. “I eventually persuaded them to have bit of seasonal interest so we have hydrangeas, Japanese anemones and astrantias – all whites to liven up the green.” This disciplined simplification of a garden has a very distinct side effect: if you do this then the hard landscaping has to be completely perfect. Without a sprawling geranium (or similar) to muffle an edge every joint, every step and every surface must be neat, tight and flawless. This is just the sort of thing at which Charlotte excels, “I am very particular about stone,” she admits. “In this garden we went through 13 different options.”

There is always a temptation in gardens like this to go just a little bit too far; to be unable to resist the lure of just a little bit of

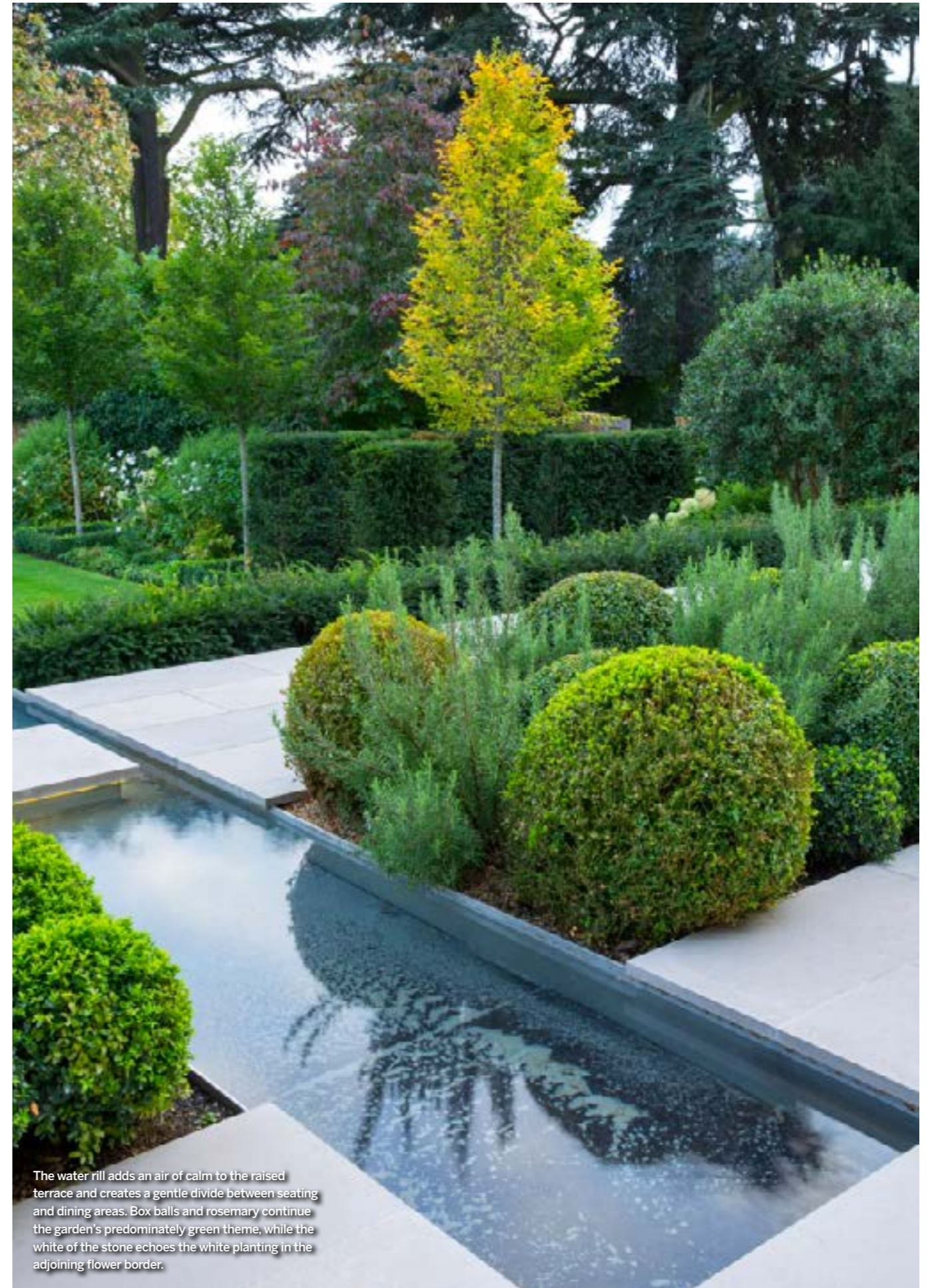
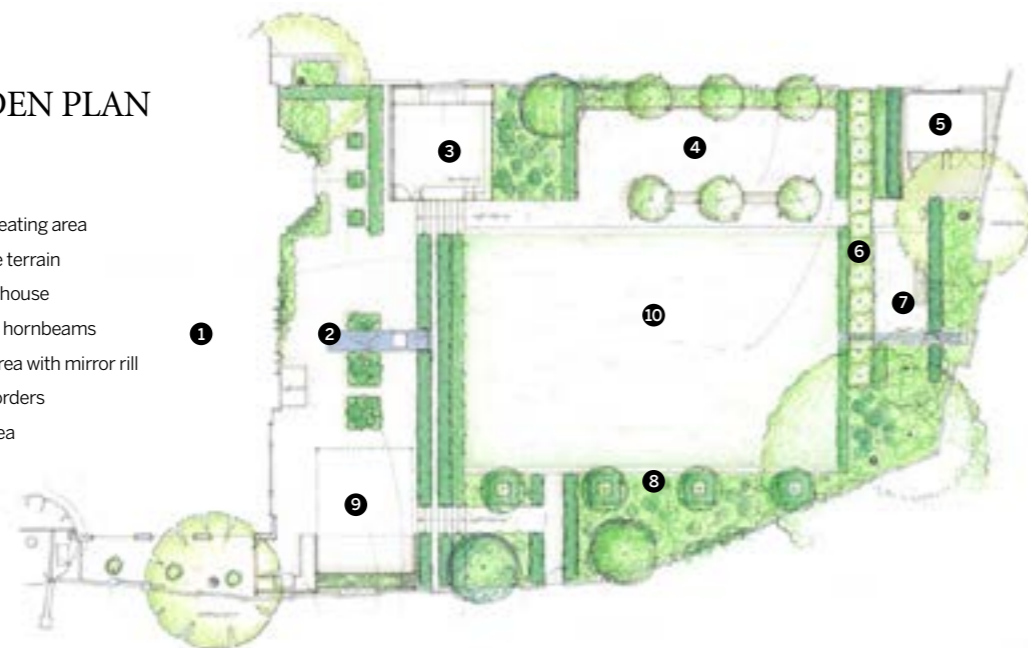
colour. However, Charlotte is a very disciplined designer and is unlikely to fall for that sort of carrot and as a result this is a garden that is as restrained and stylish as a Panama hat. Simple in design, immaculately constructed and ageless in its urbanity. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

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GARDEN PLAN

- 1 House
- 2 Rill
- 3 Sunken seating area
- 4 Pétanque terrain
- 5 Summer house
- 6 Pleached hornbeams
- 7 Seating area with mirror rill
- 8 Flower borders
- 9 Dining area
- 10 Lawn



The water rill adds an air of calm to the raised terrace and creates a gentle divide between seating and dining areas. Box balls and rosemary continue the garden's predominately green theme, while the white of the stone echoes the white planting in the adjoining flower border.