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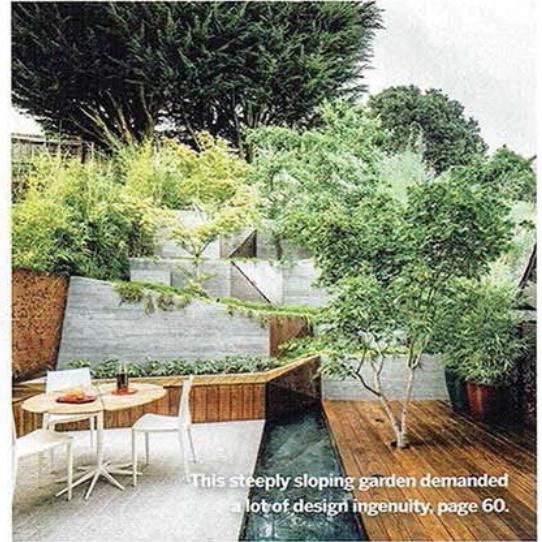


editor's letter

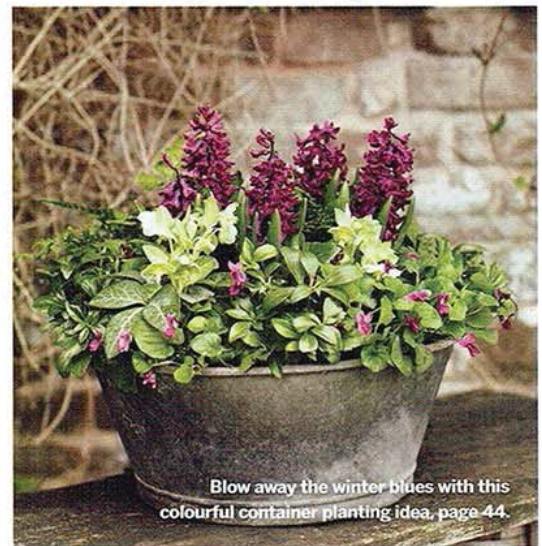


Our aim at *Gardens Illustrated* is to inspire and inform readers about the endlessly fascinating ways in which people garden all over the world. In the second of our four-part series on Allt-y-bela, designer Arne Maynard's garden in Monmouthshire, we look at how his clever plant choices and colour combinations create spring interest. On a much smaller scale and with an entirely different aesthetic, is the steeply

sloping garden in Berkeley, California, that has been given a dramatic and highly original treatment by designer Mary Barenfeld. Not only does the garden look fabulous in all seasons from the house, but the owners can now walk to the very top, which affords spectacular views over San Francisco Bay. Many of the gardens we feature in the magazine are created by the world's leading designers and while the results are breathtaking, I'm aware that to be built they often require substantial finances. This issue we look at the five-acre garden created by Charlotte and Donald Molesworth. Renowned for its topiary, the garden is utterly charming (Charlotte is an accomplished designer and artist and Donald a gardener), so I was fascinated to discover that it was made with limited resources over the course of the past 30-odd years. Turn to page 64 for Charlotte's top tips for creating style on a budget. We also begin our latest series on container planting, offering plenty of ideas and practical advice for seasonal displays. I hope you enjoy the issue.



This steeply sloping garden demanded a lot of design ingenuity, page 60.



Blow away the winter blues with this colourful container planting idea, page 44.



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A vertical challenge

In trying to create an inspiring modernist space in an exceptionally steep garden in California, Mary Barenfeld came up with a solution that is playful, angular and utterly breathtaking

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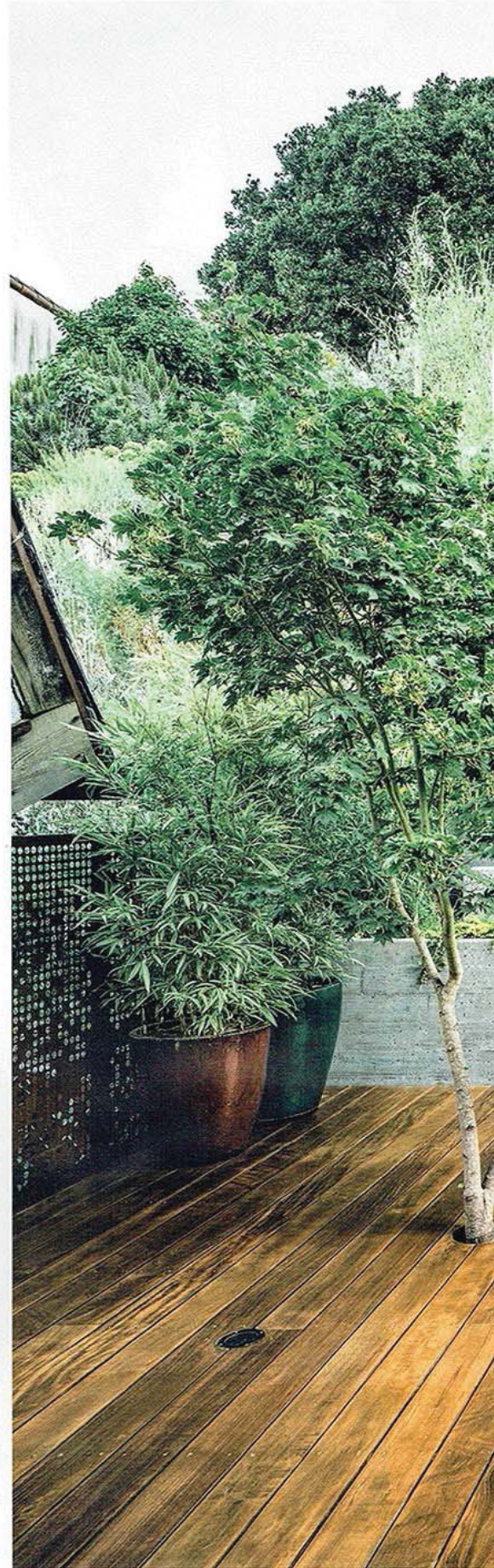
Steep gardens are not unusual in the San Francisco Bay Area in California but, even by local standards, the awkward, precipitous backyard that confronted landscape architect Mary Barenfeld when she was called into work on the Hilgard Garden in the city of Berkeley presented a major challenge.

The townhouse dates from the 1960s and exudes a cool Japanese note – cedar shingled roofline, white walls, natural wood border details – that complements the owners' early modernist aesthetic for the interiors of the house. The garden, in contrast, looked as though a slice of mountain ravine had been winched into suburbia. Rising 5m along its 15m length, the backyard was all but unusable and totally out of keeping with its sleek surroundings.

Neighbouring properties dealing with the same vertiginous terrain have chosen conventional terracing, leaving their owners with an uninspiring view filled with soaring walls of ugly paving units. "This technique obliterates any sense of place," says Mary. "I was determined to retain the uniqueness of this site while resolving its considerable challenges." She adds: "I'm always driven to creating beautiful things that make people happy, but I have a responsibility to my clients to create spaces that solve their problems while meeting their desires."

In this garden, the solution she came up with is as bold as it is brilliantly unexpected. Stepping out from the house, through the floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors and on to the shady ipe wood deck, a broad rill of water draws the sky down in reflected form. To the left, a carefully shaped Japanese maple (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Lovett') punctuates the polished timber. On the right is a white granite patio containing nothing but a sculptural table (the iconic Petal Dining Table designed by Richard Schultz in 1960) and simple white chairs. It is all beautifully judged, but not particularly exceptional. What completely takes your breath away is the remainder of the garden. More land art than landscape, ▷

The lower garden area where the deep brown ipe wood deck on the left, which plays off the rich texture of the steel panels to the right, has in-built lighting to illuminate the *Acer shirasawanum* 'Lovett' and is separated from the white granite patio by a sky-reflecting rill. Your eye is drawn up the sculptural concrete walls to the juniper trees at the top of the site.



In brief

Name Hilgard Garden.

What A steep garden with an angular design that successfully merges architecture and landscape.

Where Berkeley, California.

Size 7m x 15m.

Soil Stiff rocky clay soils, possible ancient landslide debris (the site is close to a fault zone), that was ameliorated with a mix of compost, rice hulls and chicken manure.

Climate Cool with dry summers and wet winters.

Hardiness rating USDA 10a.



▷ the slope has been sculpted into a jagged series of interconnecting slices with board-formed concrete retaining walls that are brutal and beautiful to behold.

“The clients’ brief was simply to make the garden work,” says Mary. “They wanted an entertaining area by the house but also a seating area at the end of the garden, which has a great view over San Francisco Bay. Conventional steps would take up too much space, but integrating a ramped walkway through the changing levels allowed the access route to become an integral part of the design.”

The resultant zig-zagging lines are echoed by the careful placement of two more Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* ‘Goshiki-shidare’ and *Acer palmatum* ‘Aureum’), leading the eye by the longest route up the slope. The remaining plant palette is limited to three different species – lemon thyme for aromatic ground cover, golden creeping jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* ‘Aurea’) to soften the hard concrete edges, and bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea* ‘Koi’) that sways in the breeze behind a Corten steel fence, which has been water-cut into a delicate tracery.

“Every element was carefully selected and then presented to be enjoyed in its own right,” says Mary. “In a site of great complexity, I strove for a design that was all about simplicity and restraint.” □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Mary’s work at barensfeld.com

Mary’s tips for steeply sloping gardens

I believe that architecture and landscape should always be thought of together but in a steeply sloping garden the relationship between house and garden becomes even more important. To carve out some outdoor living spaces, you will have to carry out earthworks, which will need to be professionally constructed for them to be safe.

When the slope rises away from the house, the retaining walls will become a dominant feature of the design so be sure to choose construction materials with intrinsic beauty, such as the board-formed concrete used here.

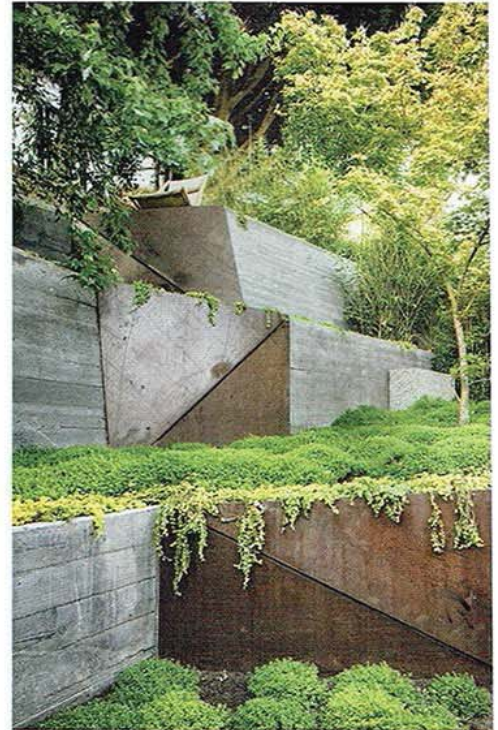
Trees are one of the first elements I consider. In terms of their importance as an organisational principle, they are as

important to me as hardscape, walls or water features. In a sloping garden they are doubly important, introducing a strong vertical note while providing screening from neighbouring properties.

Small gardens usually work best with a limited plant palette for visual continuity, but on a steeply sloping site the lower portion is often in shade while the upper areas get more sun, so research carefully and select plants that will do well in both high and low light levels.

Reflective water is a wonderful way to bring the sky down into a garden where the terrain would otherwise block it out from most angles. Lining the pool or rill with dark material will increase the reflectivity to a mirror-like intensity.

Clockwise from top left An *Acer palmatum* ‘Aureum’ underplanted with lemon thyme and golden creeping Jenny, which help soften the concrete; the upper terrace at the end of the garden has views to San Francisco across the bay; an ipe wood storage bench and bamboo frame the beautiful rust-coloured, water-cut Corten steel screen; a view from beneath the Japanese maple on the deck; clever lighting emphasises the zig-zag lines at night.





More land art than landscape, the slope has been sculpted into a jagged series of interconnecting slices

