

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

# GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

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## *Arne Maynard selects 12 of the best* **Roses**

**Penelope Hobhouse**  
reveals the secrets behind  
her remarkable new garden

**Key ideas for creating a  
classic English garden**

*How to employ*  
**A DESIGNER**



# Working with a designer

Employing a designer can transform your garden, but how do you choose the right one? Our ten-point guide is here to help

WORDS ANNIE GATTI

## 1 Why hire a designer?

Whether you're an experienced gardener or a garden novice, a good designer will suggest ideas you haven't thought of yourself. They should be able to come up with a scheme that works both practically and aesthetically, and is tailored to your needs and site. In other words, give you a high-quality bespoke service. A good designer should also be able to get you well-grown plants and a range of products – from materials, structures and fittings to accessories – at competitive prices. Even if you don't want to opt for a full redesign it can be worth asking them to cast their expert eye on a particular aspect you want to tackle – perhaps a boundary that's recently become overlooked or a troublesome area of planting – or to get ideas for changing existing elements.

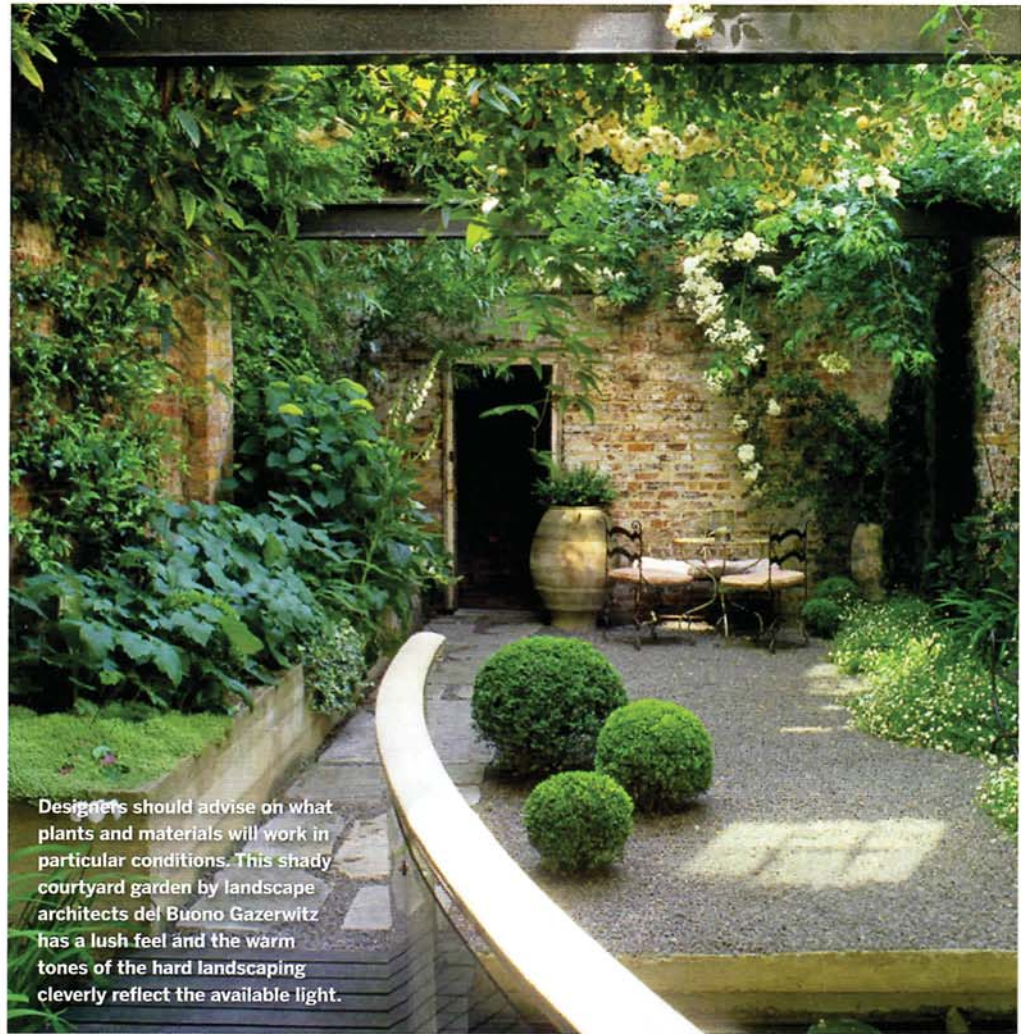


Architect Mary Barenfeld used clever, sculptural, hard landscaping elements to transform an overgrown, steeply sloping family garden in San Francisco's Bay Area (left) into this impressive outdoor room.

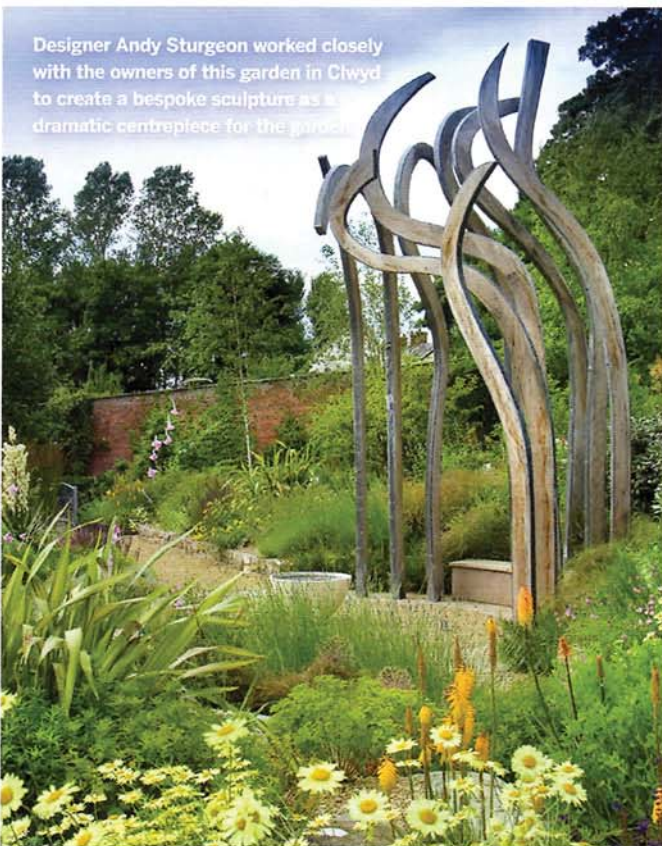
MARY BARENFELD ARCHITECTURE / WWW.BARENFELD.COM / JDE FLETCHER PHOTOGRAPHY

## 2 Before you start

It's really important to take a hard look at your garden and decide what's good – and bad – about it, and how you would like to use it. Consider who actually uses the garden and what for; how much time you want to spend looking after it; are there elements you must have, and others you'd like to have but are not essential; are there particular problem areas; what's the soil like and which are the sunny/shady parts. This will provide a really helpful brief that you can send to your potential designer before you have your initial meeting. Importantly, you should know how much money you have to spend as this will give the designer an idea of what they could include in the project. It's worth noting that some big names of the profession only work on projects of a certain value.



Designers should advise on what plants and materials will work in particular conditions. This shady courtyard garden by landscape architects del Buono Gazerwitz has a lush feel and the warm tones of the hard landscaping cleverly reflect the available light.



Designer Andy Sturgeon worked closely with the owners of this garden in Clwyd to create a bespoke sculpture as a dramatic centrepiece for the garden.

## 3 What's your style?

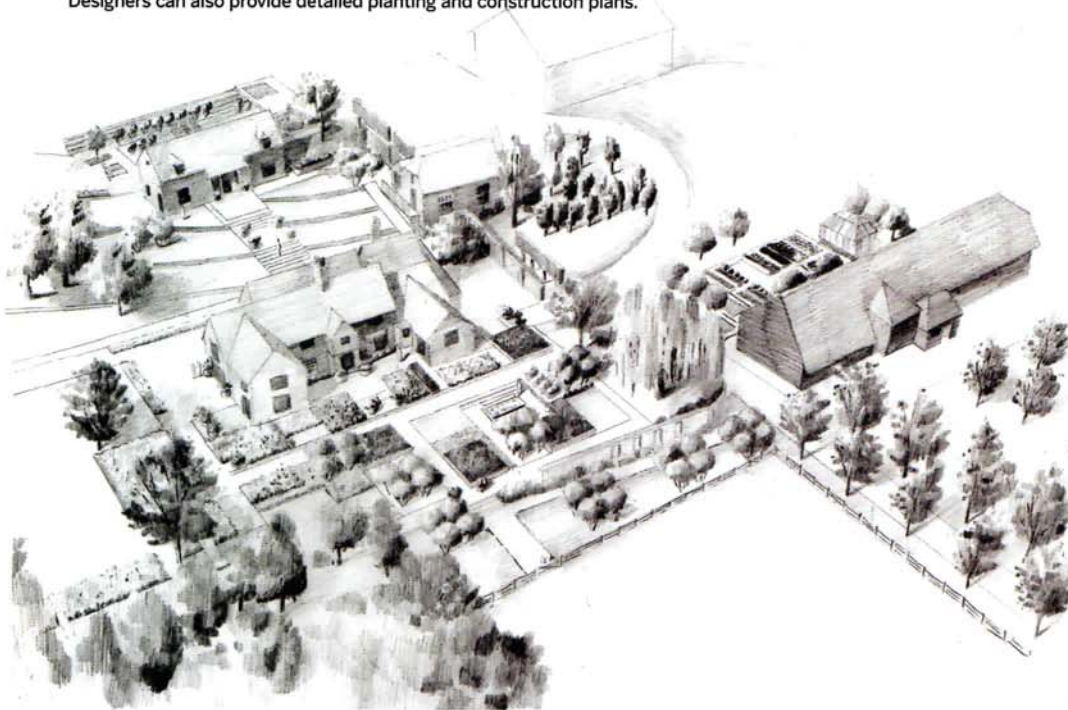
You'll also need to think about the kind of feel you want your garden to have. One of the best ways to communicate this to a designer is to make a moodboard of images. These could include photos of gardens you've visited and liked; clippings taken from magazines and newspapers or photocopies of books; or sketches of your own. Think about hard landscaping as well as plants and include images or furniture, pieces of sculpture, artwork, or simply colours or materials that you find appealing. You could make your own scrapbook or use a website, such as Pinterest ([gb.pinterest.com](http://gb.pinterest.com)), to collect images.



Tom Hoblyn  
Landscape  
and garden  
designer

*"I got the most amazingly helpful brief from clients the other day. They told me how they want to use the garden, the plants they like and dislike, what aspects of the garden they want to keep, what they want to screen, the building materials they prefer. They even sent me a link to a Pinterest board they'd made, which included some of my own work."*

Perspective drawings, such as this one by Philip Nixon Design for a country estate in Berkshire, clearly demonstrate how a scheme works. Designers can also provide detailed planting and construction plans.



## 4 Choose your package

Many designers will offer a range of different services so it's important to establish from the beginning what you want from them and how much work you are willing to do yourself. For instance, you may feel happy to source and plant your own plants, but feel less confident about managing the

build. The three most common packages are: design only, which involves drawing up concept and detailed plans including, usually, planting plans and construction plans for any hard landscaping; design and build, which means the designer will also take responsibility for building the project; and design plus overseeing the build. If you choose

the latter option you will employ the building contractor directly, although the designer may recommend ones he's worked with before, but the designer will check on the build to make sure all is going to plan. Another option is design plus project manager. In this case the designer will handle all the contracts and sign off the completed works.

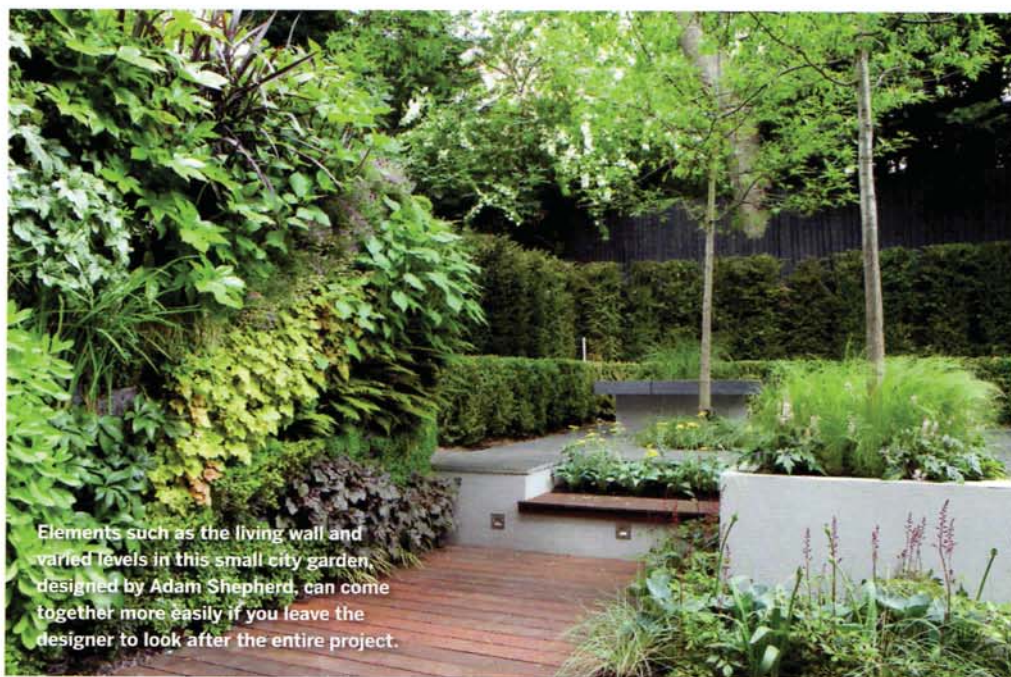
## 5 Choose your designer

By far the best way to find a designer is to ask friends for their recommendations. You can also search the websites of trade bodies, such as the Society of Garden Designers ([sgd.org.uk](http://sgd.org.uk)) and British Association of Landscape Industries ([bali.co.uk](http://bali.co.uk)). To join one of these, the designer will have been vetted by industry peers, and been in business for at least two years (three for SGD members). The Designer Directory section of [gardensillustrated.com](http://gardensillustrated.com) and Garden Design section of [gardenvisit.com](http://gardenvisit.com) also list garden designers by region or county. It's also worth checking out the websites of designers whose work you've seen and liked in magazines or elsewhere in the media and at flower shows. If you're working to a tight budget, it could be worth considering a newly qualified designer. They may have only one or two completed gardens to show you, but that should give you an idea of their creativity and competence.

Adam Shepherd  
Landscape  
designer



*"In a small space I think it's critical to add vertical interest. Traditionally, this was achieved with things such as level changes, raised planting areas and plant selection. A more contemporary approach (and my personal favourite) is to introduce living walls."*



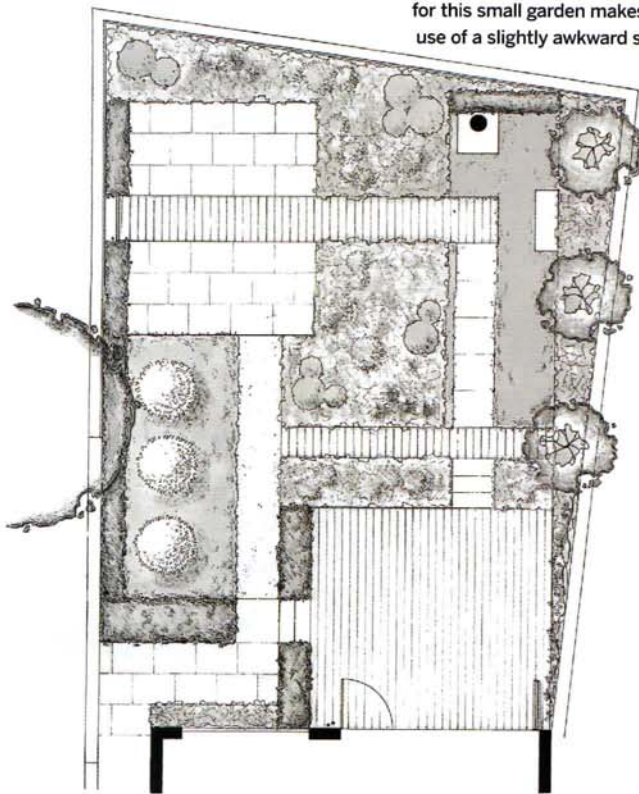
Elements such as the living wall and varied levels in this small city garden, designed by Adam Shepherd, can come together more easily if you leave the designer to look after the entire project.

BOTTOM: THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT; TOP: PHILIP NIXON DESIGN / MAX GOODCHILD



For this Cotswold garden, designer Tim Rees's choice of pretty, informal plants fits in perfectly with the existing rustic-looking gazebo.

Designer Charlotte Rowe's plan for this small garden makes best use of a slightly awkward shape.



## 7 Step by step

After an initial consultation, the designer will send you a letter or email outlining what they understand from your brief. They should also give you an indication of their costs for the survey, concept plan, any perspective sketches and/or CGI visuals, masterplan (this is drawn up once you have discussed and approved the concept plan with the designer) and any detailed plans and schedule of works. The designer holds the copyright to the plans. If you use an independent contractor, the designer can then recommend a number of firms and organise the tender process or you can do this yourself, but if the designer is overseeing the build or project managing it is advisable to use a contractor they have used before.

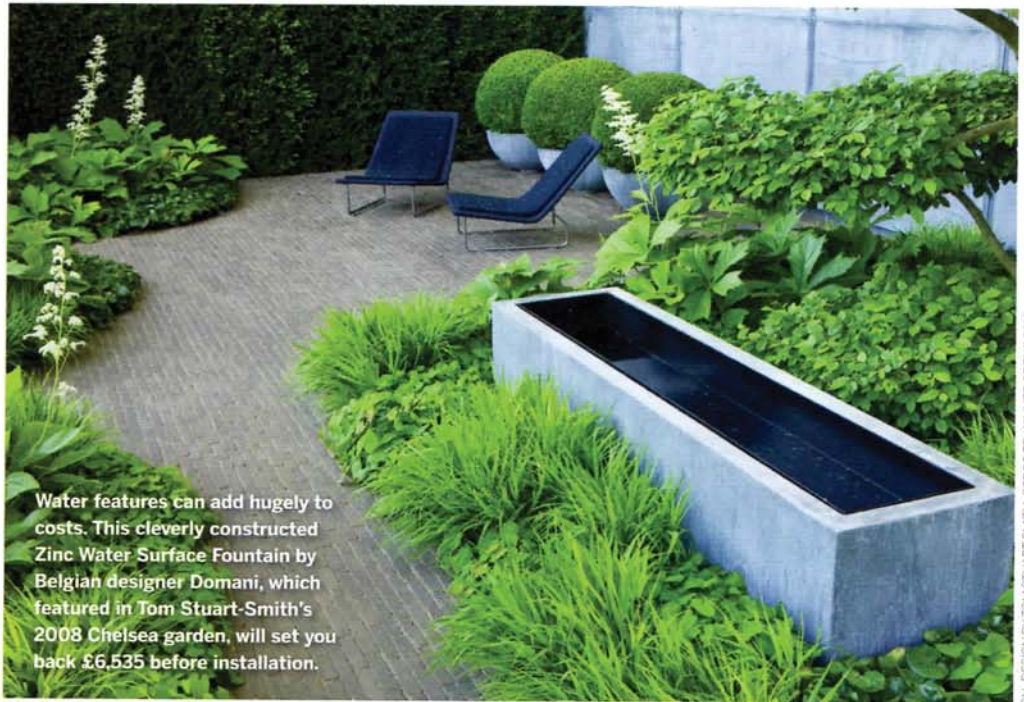


Janine Pattison  
Garden designer

*“The briefing process is critical. As a designer you need to absorb every bit of information about the owners, their house, the furnishings, style of decorating, art work on the walls and the cars they drive. Also, it’s essential you meet both partners if the garden is owned by two people.”*

## 6 Qualifications

Holding a qualification in garden design isn't essential. There are some well-known and highly respected designers with no formal qualifications who've honed all their skills on the job. However, there are several excellent courses in garden design, including those at Inchbald School of Design, KLC School of Design, the English Gardening School and London College of Garden Design, and holding a diploma from one of these is a good indication of a designer's skill. Perhaps more important is to take a look at their online and printed portfolios and see if theirs is the kind of work you like – and always ask to see some before and after photos. It's also important to meet with the designer face to face to see if this is someone who's on your wavelength and with whom you'd be comfortable to work over a period of several months.



Water features can add hugely to costs. This cleverly constructed Zinc Water Surface Fountain by Belgian designer Domani, which featured in Tom Stuart-Smith's 2008 Chelsea garden, will set you back £6,535 before installation.

## 8 Costs

Costs will vary depending on the experience of the designer and the size and complexity of the project. A self-employed designer, just starting out, will cost less than an established firm with bigger overheads, although some well-

established designers may be prepared to take on smaller projects, for a reasonable fee, if they like the design challenge. Even if smaller, a courtyard garden with sophisticated exterior lighting and furniture, could cost more than a larger garden with expanses of lawn

and flower beds. Designs that require a lot of labour will always be more costly, as will those that involve hard landscaping, water features or changes of level. Removing rubble from the site or needing to bring all the construction elements through the house can all add to the cost.

TOP: CHARLOTTE ROWE. BOTTOM: GARDEN PHOTOS / MARK BOLTON. DESIGN BY TOM STUART-SMITH. OPPOSITE: WINNER OF THE 2010 BAU LANDSCAPE DESIGN EXCELLENCE AWARD (FOR A PROJECT COSTING MORE THAN £50K) - ANDREW WEBB-HAM GARDEN DESIGN

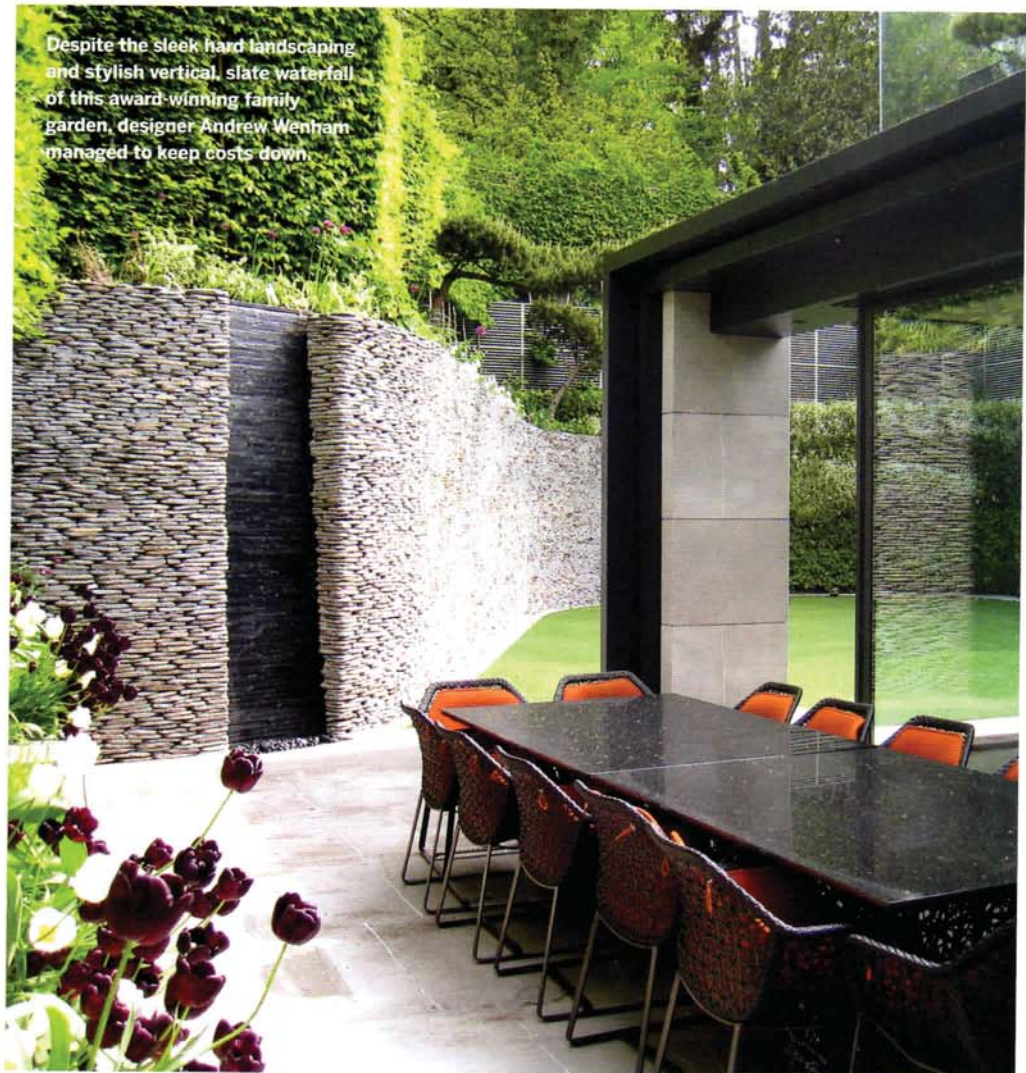
## 9 Keep the cost down

Once you've agreed the budget, don't forget that anything you add will increase the overall cost. If there are unexpected extras, the designer or contractor should alert you straightaway and you should discuss how best to manage them within the budget. Doing the planting out yourself, and specifying smaller plants, can make savings or you could choose a less expensive paving material. Designers can usually source good-quality plants at trade prices which will be cheaper than retail nurseries or garden centres. Re-using elements from your existing garden can also reduce your spend.



**Juliet Sargeant**  
Garden designer

*"If you're doing works on the house it can save money to bring in the garden designer before you start, for example by using excavated soil or rubble in the design rather than taking them off site."*



Despite the sleek hard landscaping and stylish vertical, slate waterfall of this award-winning family garden, designer Andrew Wenham managed to keep costs down.

## 10 Keep it legal

It's important you set out the terms of the job, making clear what you are paying for and when, and detailing any future maintenance arrangements, in a written agreement. SGD and BALI members use a standard JCLI Homeowner Consultancy Agreement contract, but whatever

contract you use make sure it covers anything that's likely to be disputed. If you do have a dispute that can't be resolved with the designer, SGD and BALI can help resolve problems with their members before it ends up in the Small Claims Court. One thing you should agree in advance is payment terms. Many designers

prefer to receive their fee in stages, and while some charge for their initial consultation, others don't. Some charge for part of the job, for example site visits while overseeing the build, on an hourly rate. Contractors often want a deposit of between 10 and 50 per cent of the build, depending on the size of the project.

## Budget guide

These three projects will give you a rough idea of the kind of costs involved.

**Garden 1** Courtyard garden, 2m x 4.5m.

**Work done** Two brick paths and tile-on-edge circular patio, two beds with herbaceous plants and climbers.

**Time to complete** One week.

**Cost** £2,475, includes designer fee of £475.

**Garden 2** City garden, 56 square metres.

**Work done** Site cleared, ground prepared; bespoke fireplace; metal-edged basalt paving; hardwood-clad boundary wall; new drainage, lighting and irrigation, pleached hornbeams, topiary box, perennials, grasses, outdoor sofas, tables and chairs.

**Time to complete** Three months.

**Cost** £99,800, includes designer fee of £14,250.

**Garden 3** Rural Garden, about 1.5 acres

**Work done** New terrace, ornamental vegetable garden, lawns, 12m x 3m water feature with stepping stones, extensive borders with shrubs and perennials, backdrop of pleached hornbeams, yew hedging, re-alignment of driveway.

**Time to complete** Nine months.

**Cost** £250,000, includes designer fee of £20,000.