

TEXT CLARE FOSTER | PHOTOGRAPHS BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER

# LET IT FLOW

In this London garden, designer Tom Massey has created a series of unfolding garden rooms linked by a manmade stream, which makes its way to the house through a woodland wilderness, a pretty potager and elegant formal areas

Steps lead from the terrace near the house to a lawn edged by densely planted borders. An iroko wood screen separates this area from a vegetable plot

It is a design solution for many a long and narrow London plot to divide the space into three or four sections, so that the garden is not revealed all at once, counter-intuitively making it seem larger. This is exactly what Tom Massey has done with this garden in Richmond, but in such an ingenious and detailed way that it is hard to believe it was one of his first ever garden commissions.

Thirty-five-year-old Tom, who was one of the designers on the BBC Two series *Your Garden Made Perfect* earlier this year, studied at the London College of Garden Design at Kew before setting up his own practice in 2015. Not one to rest on his laurels, he created a gold-medal-winning show garden at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show the following year, which is where he was discovered by the owners of this London garden.

About 100 metres long, with a simple York stone terrace near the house leading up to a formal lawn and borders, it has a small potager in the middle and an intriguing woodland wildness at the far end. The sections are divided by layered screens made from chunky iroko wood uprights, which allow glimpses through and beyond each area, as well as casting beautiful shadows. A ribbon of water runs the length of the garden, starting in the woodland area, where it bubbles up through a boulder like a natural spring, and transitioning to a Corten-steel rill in the more formal areas before emerging into a lily trough on the terrace. 'The water links the whole space and draws you into the garden,' says Tom. 'Water brings so much to a garden: sound, movement, reflections and wildlife all add different dimensions.'

Rather than making borders on either side of the stone terrace, which would have eaten into the already narrow space, Tom decided to create living walls on both sides, collaborating with green-wall specialist Tapestry Vertical Gardens. Large plants such as fatiasas, euphorbias and fuchsias are thriving here in the hydroponic system, giving a fabulous 3D textured effect. From the terrace, stone steps lead up to the formal lawn and borders, where plants such as *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm', *Hydrangea quercifolia* and *Molinia* 'Heidebraut' come into their own in late summer. Six small parrotia trees, three on each side of the lawn, rise up from the planting. Tom chose the cultivar 'Vanessa' – with a more compact, upright shape than the species itself, it is ideal for a small garden.

A stepping stone path up the side of the lawn is designed to deliberately slow you down as you walk. This leads through to the small potager, where the path continues unbroken now, curving round alongside the narrow rill. Raised Corten-edged beds and a small minimal-framed greenhouse fit cleanly into the space, while pear trees are trained against the boundary wall. Finally, you reach the woodland area at the back of the garden, a relaxed retreat in which a contemporary iroko-clad garden building is cocooned by leafy hawthorn trees and naturalistic ferns, Baltic parsley and feathery *deschampsia* grass. Trees in neighbouring gardens mean that it is difficult to see where the garden ends. 'Borrowing from the surrounding landscape is so important in a small garden,' observes Tom. 'You have to look closely at what is already there and work with it rather than fighting against it.'

There are many facets to this garden, but like the pieces of a perfectly finished jigsaw, they all slot together seamlessly to create a brilliantly clever space. With green walls, water features, high-spec hardscaping and a bespoke garden room, this was not a cheap garden to build, with costs running to several hundred thousand pounds. 'It was a dream project,' admits Tom. 'Part of the brief was that it should be child friendly, so instead of a climbing frame, I put in a stream. You can hop across the boulders, splash in the water or sail a toy boat down the rill. I try and make all my gardens fun and playful' □

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Tom Massey Studio: [tommassey.co.uk](http://tommassey.co.uk). Tom is designing the Yeo Valley Organic Garden for the inaugural autumn RHS Chelsea Flower Show, September 21-26; [rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk)

## 'Water brings so much to a garden: sound, movement, reflections and wildlife all add different dimensions'

THIS PAGE A view up the side of the garden shows the stepping-stone path, alongside which runs a narrow rill carrying water from the top end of the garden to the bottom. OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The rill culminates in a Corten-steel lily pond, fed by a simple waterfall, with a leafy living wall above. Looking towards the house from the top end of the garden, the York stone path curves round in a more informal way, while interesting shadows are cast by the iroko wood screen. The rill turns into a stepped waterfall as it runs down to the bottom terrace. In the woodland area at the far end of the garden, the waterway widens out into a stream shaped with boulders and softened by shade-loving plants

