

TEXT
JODIE JONESPHOTOGRAPHS
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Divide and



conquer

By splitting this east London garden into different zones, designer Jackie Cahoon increased the sense of space and turned a previously uninspiring plot into an outdoor oasis perfect for a young family

What do you want from your garden? Two years ago, with one small child and another one on the way, Katie and Joe Mackay-Sinclair asked themselves that question and realised that what they actually wanted was several different gardens. 'I dreamed of somewhere I could sit with the baby while his big brother played, somewhere we could cook and eat, and somewhere to hang out with our friends,' recalls Katie.

Given that the land behind their east London home was a typically long, thin and rather uninspiring strip, they turned to local designer Jackie Cahoon to help turn this ambitious idea

into reality. 'When I heard them talking, it put me in mind of the Swedish *sommarstuga* – a summer cottage hideaway in the country – where people traditionally go to recharge and relax, surrounded by nature,' she explains. 'It's a place filled with dappled light, natural materials and stylish simplicity.'

This was a far cry from the dilapidated reality of the existing garden, with its worn grass and shabby garden room. 'The structural underpinnings were good,' says Jackie. 'There were two mature plum trees and the garden room was pretty sound. We just needed to reorganise the space to get the most out of it.'

Taking a strong, geometric approach, she divided up the

ABOVE Mauve *Origanum laevigatum* 'Herrenhausen' and orange *Helenium* 'Sahin's Early Flowerer' flank the bamboo boardwalk, which steps up in the central area to double as a bench on one side of the dining table in the outdoor kitchen. Different surfaces delineate the various areas



ABOVE Chairs and a side table by EcoBirdy, made from recycled plastic, are grouped on clay pavers below an espaliered apple tree on one side of the space. BELOW A steel arch frames a view of the dining area and outdoor kitchen, and the secluded area beside the garden room. TOP RIGHT *Cosmos bipinnatus* Sensation Series



space to create a terrace for sitting next to the house, a large central open area for cooking and eating, and a secluded nook at the end of the garden to provide comfortable shelter whatever the weather. Linking it all together, she laid a bamboo boardwalk running the length of the garden, which steps up in the central zone to double as a bench on one side of the dining table. 'It works so well,' says Katie. 'We cram lots of people onto it when we're entertaining, the boys use it as a catwalk for their games, and it also protects the main flowerbed from flying footballs.' This long bed beside the boardwalk is filled with a punchy combination of robust perennials, including *Helenium* 'Sahin's Early Flowerer', bright crocosmias and the vermilion rose 'Summer Song', all chosen to reflect Katie's love of bold colour. The whole display is also very low maintenance. 'We both have busy jobs and travel a lot for work, so when we're at home we just want to relax with the kids in the garden,' she says.

The muddy lawn was banished under a combination of all-weather surfaces, ideal for the children to play on. Limestone slabs were used for the seating area by the house, clay pavers were laid in transit areas and bonded gravel surrounds the table, further emphasising the zoning of the space.

With the garden having been conceived primarily as an extension of the house's interior, accessories were another important element of the redesign. Jackie sourced the slim-line concrete WWOO outdoor kitchen, which she describes as a 'posh flatpack'. Many other elements were found by Joe and Katie, expert internet explorers. 'I got the modular seating for the nook in an online sale, but it fits the space so perfectly that it looks bespoke,' she says. 'And the chairs near the house are by EcoBirdy, a children's brand I like that had branched out into adult furniture.' But her favourite find is the dining table, which is unusually long and thin, and slots into the space brilliantly. 'It has legs shaped like swans and I collect vintage ceramic swans – Joe saw it on Vinterior and we had to go for it.'

'We couldn't be happier with the redesign,' she says. 'It has basically doubled our living space. But it has also introduced us to the joys of nature. Our younger son is obsessed with bees. And the older one has signed us up to Pot Gang, a monthly subscription service for seed, compost and pots, and he checks on his tomatoes all the time. Our garden is now an oasis of calm where we all feel perfectly at home' □

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