

# Latin style

How designer Roberto Silva created a London garden that combines Brazilian flair with traditional craftsmanship

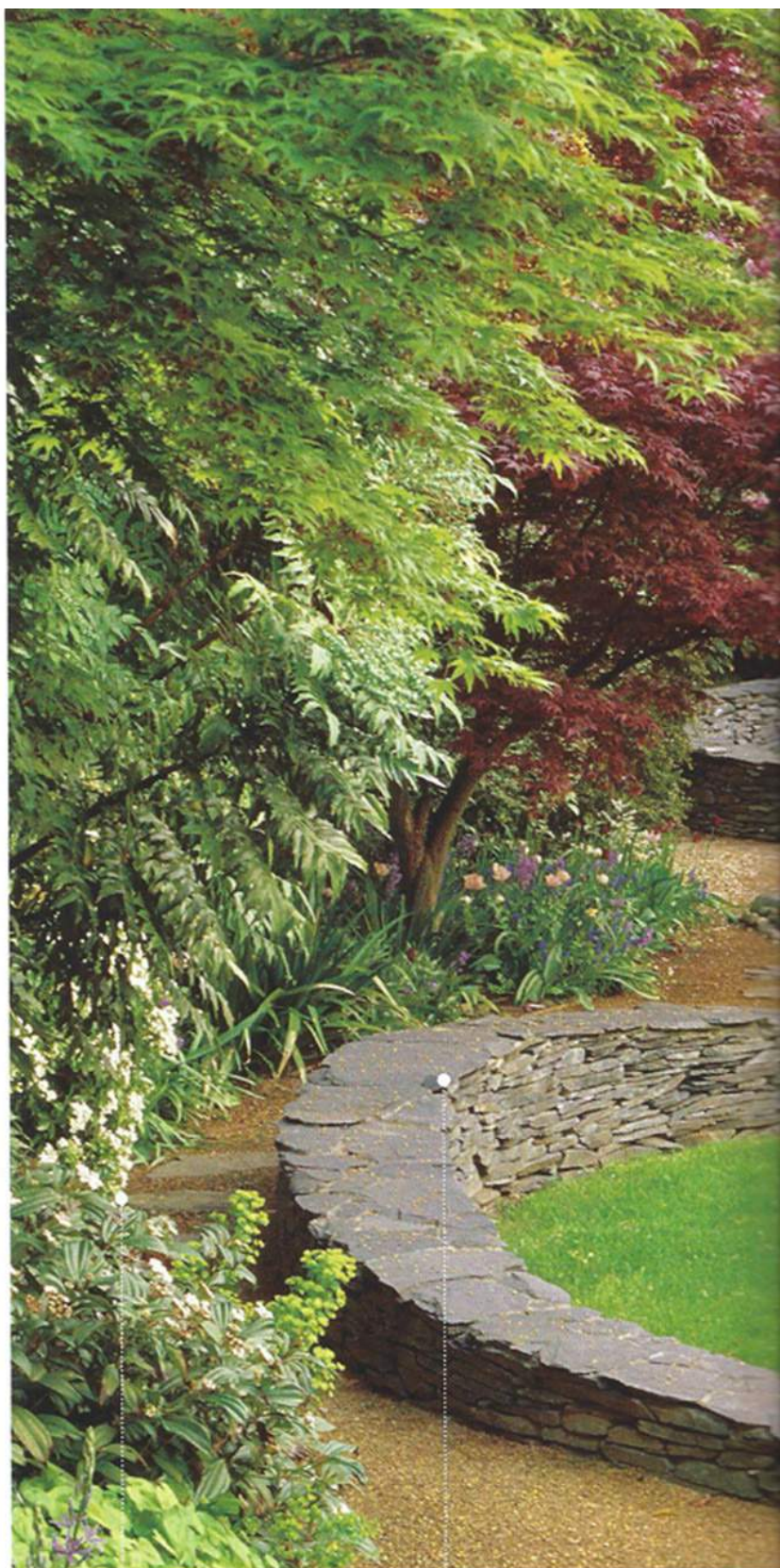
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**T**his design, for a south London garden, 6m by 40m, is based on a single simple idea, around which everything else is held in perfect balance. That idea is the wall, and it operates on a number of levels - shaping the garden, dividing it into separate areas and acting as an informal seat and resting place.

The brief from the garden's owner to Brazilian born designer Roberto Silva was for a contemporary design, which would include water and exotic planting. Roberto also felt that his client, a knowledgeable gardener, would want something that was both distinctive and original. It was agreed that while much of the existing planting was expendable, a specimen prunus in the centre of the south facing garden would stay, and this would inevitably have a strong influence on the layout. And, as it turned out, what initially seemed a limiting factor, was to provide the key to the whole design.



**DESIGNER PROFILE**  
LANDSCAPE AND GARDEN DESIGNER ROBERTO SILVA studied garden design at Capel Manor and Landscape Architecture (MA) at the University of Greenwich. His passion for design has led him to write the book, *New Brazilian Gardens: The Legacy of Burle Marx* (Thames & Hudson). Roberto Silva, 2a Grand Parade, Green Lanes, London N4 1JX. Tel: +44 (0)20 8880 1671. [www.silvalandscapes.com](http://www.silvalandscapes.com)



Stone is used in a variety of shapes and forms, linking the ground pattern with the wall. The almost-smooth surface of the gravel is inlaid with irregular slices of York paving. A boulder rises out of the lawn and is echoed by the taller caims of stone that make the water feature.

The design evolved in stages, starting with a series of circles that centred on the prunus. The circles were then loosened out to form a continuous serpentine line, but the real breakthrough came when the line acquired a three-dimensional life, and raised itself off the ground to become a wall.



The wall's 'movement' effectively divides the garden into three distinct areas of grass, self-binding gravel, and, here, at the back of the garden, a hardwood deck, filling the circular space, and providing an area for sitting and relaxing.

The water element consists of three stone stacks of different heights that spout and bubble water back into the pebble bed around them. Combined with the nearby planting of acers, bamboos and prunus, it contributes a gentle Japanese note but not a conflict of styles.

The ornamental cherry tree (*Prunus* 'Kanzan') was one of the few plants kept from the original planting and its position in the centre of the garden could have been seen as a limitation to the design. Roberto's solution has produced a garden in which the generous open spaces are perfectly balanced by the structural forms of wall and perimeter planting.

The slate wall was rebuilt twice to get the undulating effect that Silva wanted. He cites two important influences: the Brazilian landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx and the British land artist Andy Goldsworthy. Silva's design fuses Burle Marx's trademark curves with a Goldsworthy inspired organic structure that is part-sculpture, part ground-modelling. ▶