



STRAIGHT LINES NEED NOT APPLY

Brazilian garden designer Roberto Silva (above) has made one of the most innovative new London gardens in years

REPORT BY PAUL THOMPSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUNE BUCK

First sight of a garden can stop you in your tracks and render you silent. The reason for such momentary inertia might be that you are witnessing something new, bold, beautiful and brilliant, or it could be that you have just encountered true tastelessness. In the case of Roberto Silva's design for a large, suburban south London garden it is definitely the former. For none but fools could rush in here; this garden does not allow you to walk in unannounced – rather, it challenges you to linger. It is as if an invisible threshold compels you to spend a few moments in respectful contemplation before you can walk further into the garden. This is due to the fact that what this young Brazilian designer has implemented here is no mere assemblage of plants and structural features. He has painted on the land – as if the plot were a blank canvas – and his painting has become an amazing garden for Amanda Forsters and her family.

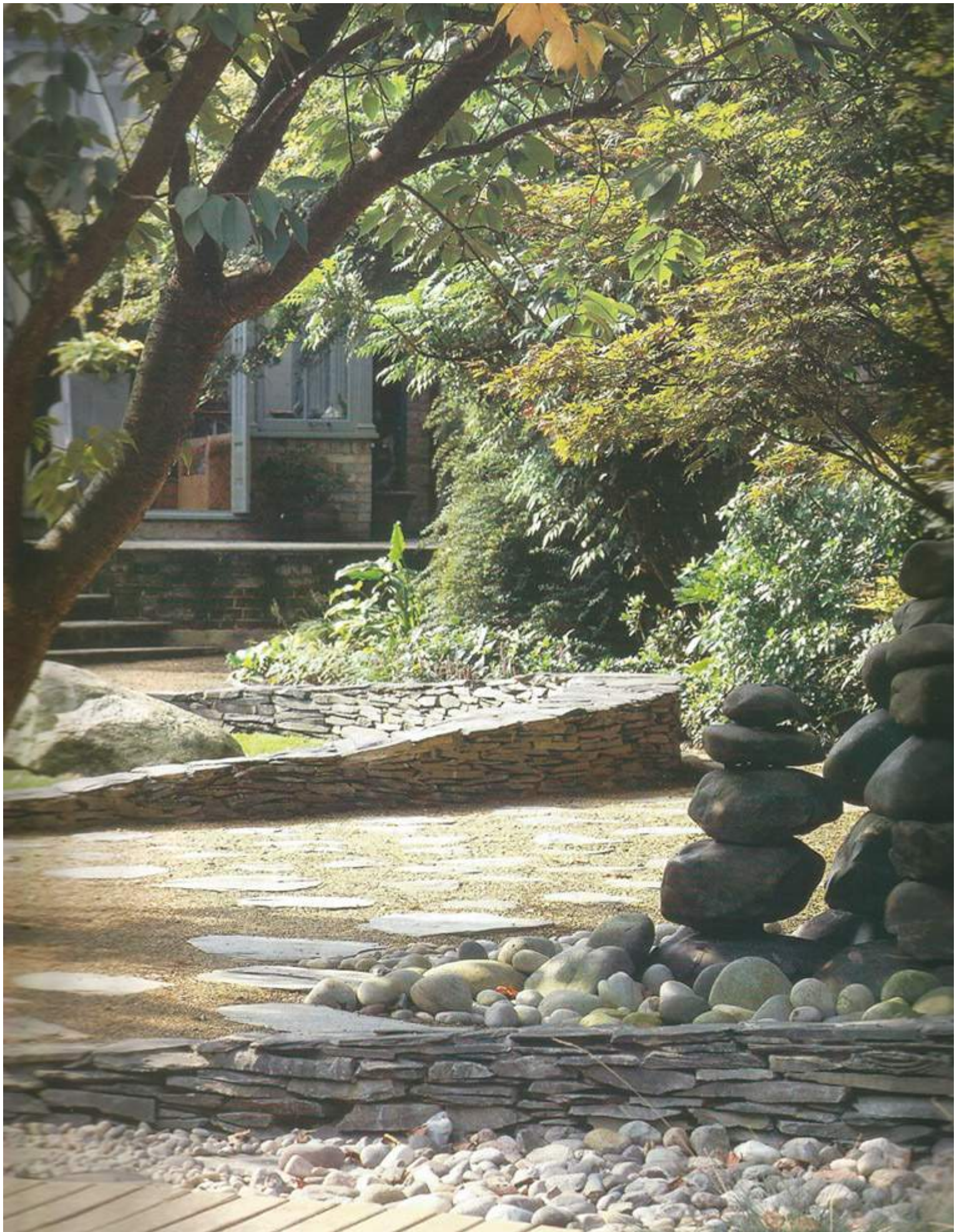
Amanda's creative partnership with Roberto was destined for success from the outset: 'We hit it off immediately,' she says. 'I knew I wanted things on a large scale and Roberto's ideas enabled me to be even braver than I might otherwise have been.' With such enthusiasm on his side, Roberto was able to contemplate a bold response to such a large space: 'I wanted to create a garden that would feel entirely different,' he says, 'one that would be defined by a really strong concept.' A flip through renowned land artist Andy Goldsworthy's book *Stone* caused Amanda to go 'bananas' over the photographs of dry stone walls and the concept was born.

The stone wall that Roberto designed for this garden has its own unique character and a certain amount of attitude. Thousands of slithers of riven slate – myriad scales and armour-plating – define and protect this serpentine, sculpted wall. Ruling over Roberto's collage of textures and colours, it dominates the features of this south-facing garden with the brooding menace of a python sleeping in a jewel-encrusted lair.

Slinking away from the terrace behind the house it writhes and undulates, arching no more than a few feet, and then sinks low upon its belly before twirling about the foot of a cherry tree in the centre of the garden.

Twisting and contorting, it rises again as it encircles a large timber deck at the end of the garden before it subsides into the flowing lines of a border. For Amanda, though, it is not without function: 'Kids run along it, dogs jump over it, it's a seat, we lie on it in the sun – it's not just

Roberto Silva's
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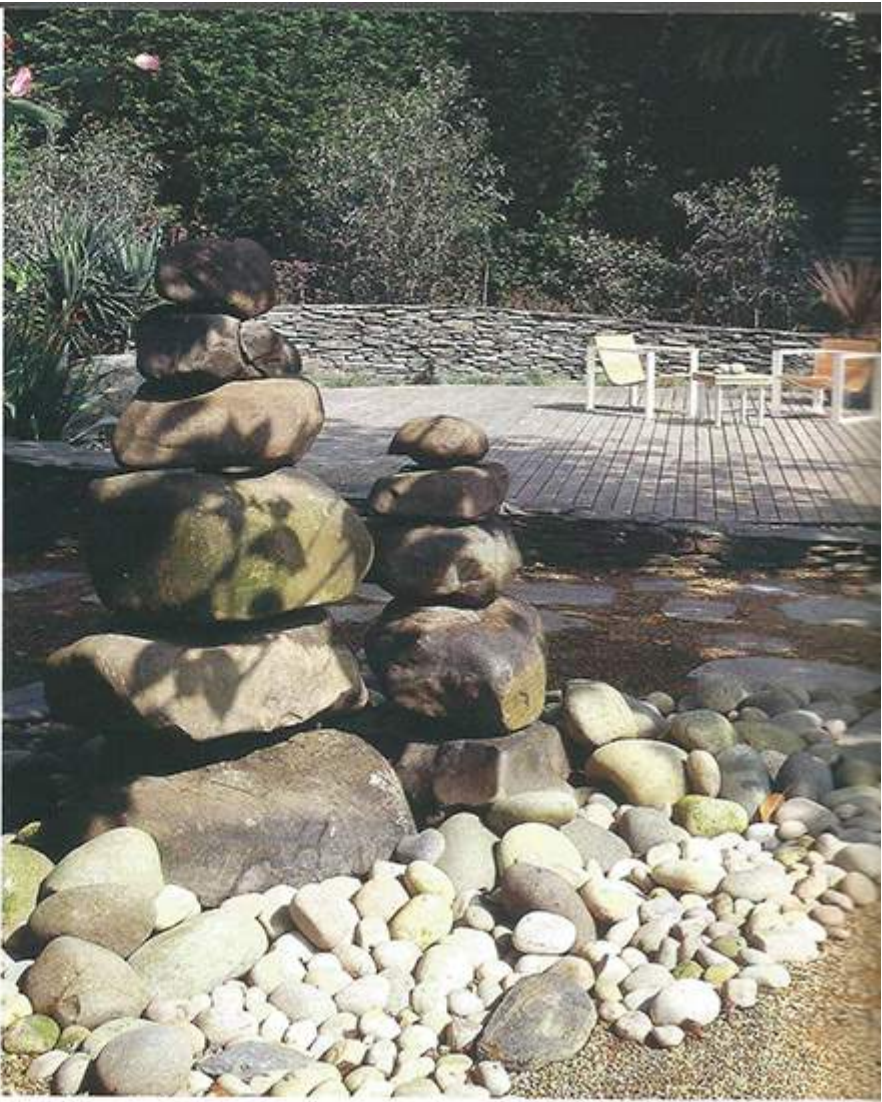


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though functional, the garden is so rich in Roberto's
that everything becomes sculpture – part of the art.
stepping on to the grass for fear of disrupting it.
needs are well met and fit seamlessly within this
work. A pathway of self-binding gravel accompanies
journey. This pools beneath the cherry tree where
with a refreshing clatter from hidden reservoirs
oldsworthy-esque stone stacks (right). Around
forms lie numerous slate 'flats' in conspicuous
cast aside by those who built the wall. The large
beyond the cherry is an arena for all manner of
ing live music. Hidden behind a large boulder that
deck are sockets for electric guitars and amplifiers.
g all of this is a selection of trees, shrubs and peren-
tials as a *Who's Who* of foliage. Like his countryman,
landscape architect and gardener Roberto Burle
iberto Silva plants in groups and blocks as if filling in
tious to his painting. Acers, which have brilliant
ann foliage, wonderful evergreens, such as silvery-
ey-leaved eucalyptus and mahonia shrubs, tall tree ferns
(*Dicksonia*), ligularias which have delightful heart-shaped
leaves and the tufty stipa grasses are all resident here.

This style of planting feels well thought out and
unfussy – similar to the sort of block planting that is
common to urban landscaping – and it provides
strong support to Roberto's design concept.

Amanda feels empowered by what Roberto
has created for her: 'It has given me the
impetus to try and take more chances,' she
explains. This input is already creating the
sort of polite conflict that is all too
common between client and designer.
Amanda has purchased a sculpture and
is keen to place it beside the cherry



(Above) Organic sculpture:
the stone stacks reflect the
shadows of the cherry tree



(Right) A tree fern looks
dramatically incongruous
against the Welsh slate

(Left) Sea buckthorn
(*Hippophae rhamnoides*)
suits the arid surroundings





The lance-shaped, steely-grey leaves of *Agave americana* soften the deck's edge and tone in with the slate-and-wood colours of the garden scheme

tree – and she knows this rankles with Roberto. 'He likes the sculpture, but it really bugs him – because it's not balanced from his point of view, it's not part of the original shape.'

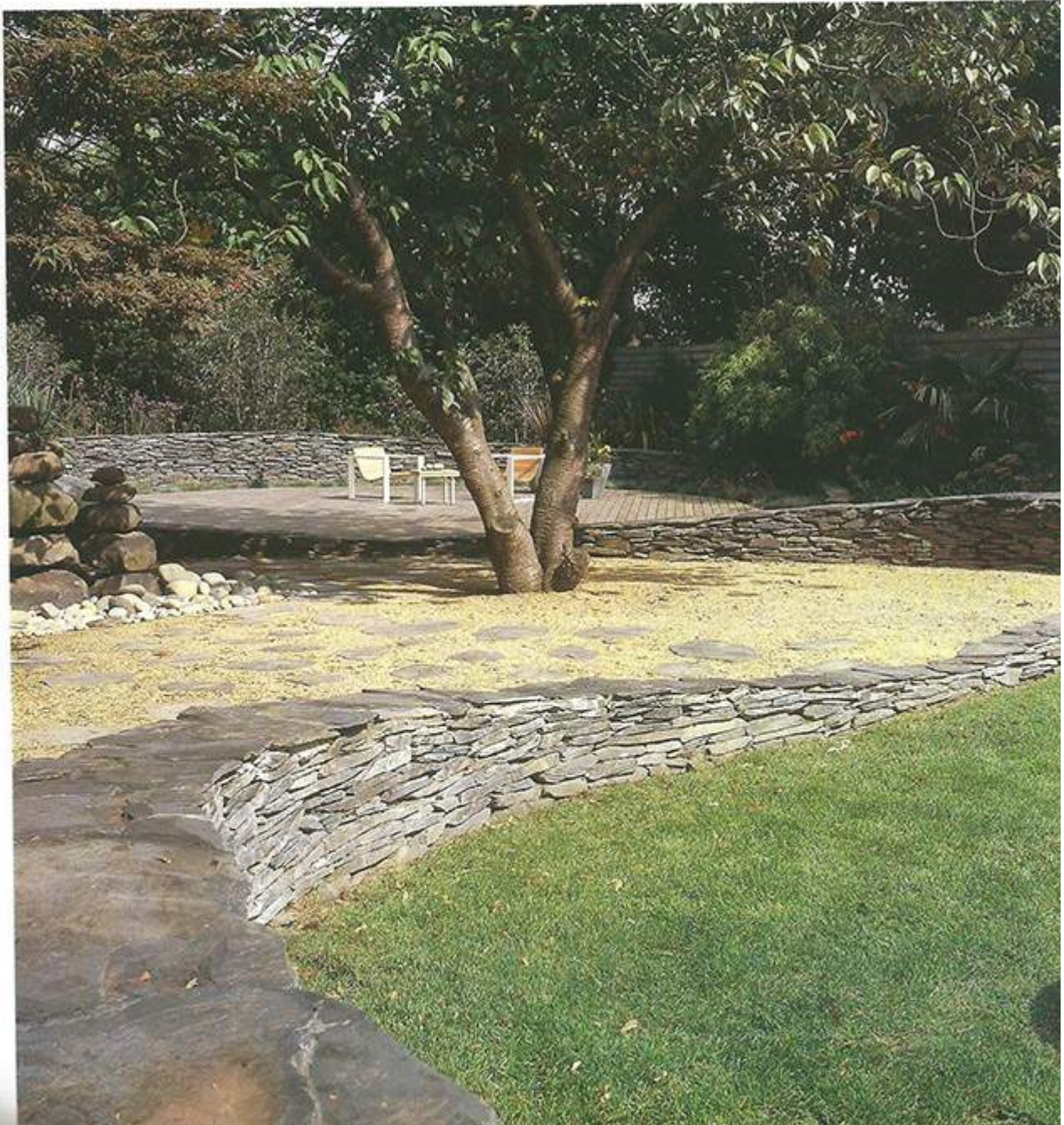
Roberto smiles, his eyes rolling back, 'It is hard for people to leave empty spaces in their gardens,' he says.

Out in the garden, the predatory slate serpent is covetously studying the neighbouring plots – this hungry creature wants to consume more. Already it would seem that the confines of Amanda's boundaries are too limiting and the serpent of Roberto's design longs to ride out to devour more of the pretty English gardens that surround its home. ●



(Above) Evergreen *Sedum spectabile* has the graphic quality that is the trademark of this sculpted garden

(Right) The garden's structure has an organic look. Dry-slate walls divide the orange of the self-binding gravel from the lush green of the lawn





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