DESIGN focus

SMALL GARDEN

Latin style

How designer Roberto Silva created a London garden that combines Brazilian flair with traditional craftsmanship PHOTOGRAPHS JERRY HARPUR WORDS ANNE DEVERTEUIL

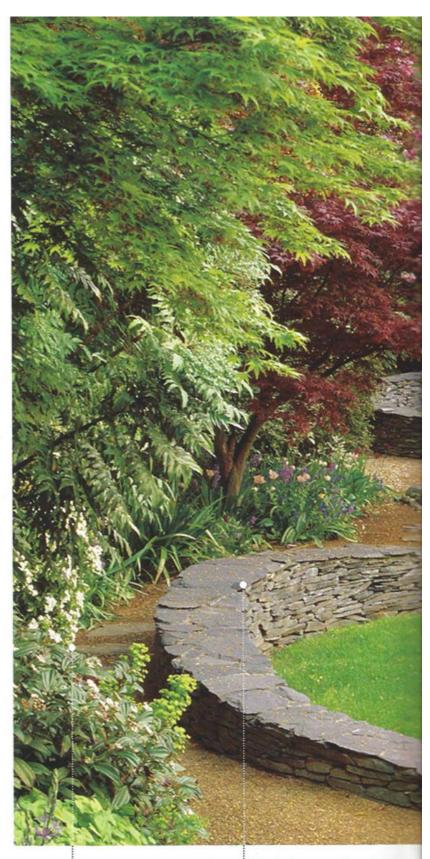
his design, for a south London garden, 6m by 40m, is based on a single simple idea, around which everything else is held in perfect balance. That idea is the wall, and it operates on a number of levels - shaping the garden, dividing it into separate areas and acting as an informal seat and resting place.

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,
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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 cairns 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 wail.

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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 omamental 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.