



New garden design talent

OPPOSITE Stefano Marinaz
outside a garden he has designed
in Kensington. THIS PAGE
Geranium 'Rozanne'

PART 1

STEFANO MARINAZ

In the first of a new series highlighting rising stars, CLARE FOSTER meets Stefano Marinaz, whose passion for unusual planting and comprehensive service have made him a popular choice for the residents of west London

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



In the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Italian-born Stefano Marinaz is the garden designer of the moment. People spot his van in the street and watch as balconies and front gardens are miraculously transformed. They go for drinks in a neighbour's newly designed back garden and, before they know it, they are commissioning him to design their garden, too.

Keeping up with the Joneses is a very real phenomenon, and the result for Stefano has been a string of commissions

in little pockets of London, as well as in the country for clients who happen to have second homes. His USP is that he offers not only a design and build service but also a comprehensive ongoing maintenance programme from the two Kew-trained gardeners he employs. 'It's so important to look after the gardens afterwards, so we offer a complete package,' says Stefano. 'We watch how the plants establish and we adjust the planting with the seasons.'

Now 36, Stefano originally studied agronomy in Italy before doing an MA in landscape architecture at the University of Greenwich. Never one to waste time, he spent a few months as a horticultural intern at Kew while he waited for the course to start, later becoming a Kew

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patron. He set up his own business in 2012 after working in several high-profile practices to get experience in different disciplines. 'I spent three years with Arne Maynard as a project manager and before that was at Gillespies and Land Use Consultants,' he says. 'I've taken different elements from each practice, from large-scale construction and hard landscaping to small private projects.'

It is the planting, however, that excites him the most, perhaps not surprisingly given his background. His grandfather started a seed company, Semar, in Trieste 75 years ago, which is now run by Stefano's father and has grown to become a highly successful horticultural retail and wholesale business. 'I can remember sowing seeds with my grandfather in his greenhouse,' says Stefano. 'We had flowers in the garden and also grew vegetables on an allotment.' The allotment addiction still runs strongly through his veins; he has recently managed to get a plot in Chiswick, which he uses as an experimentation ground for new plants, as well as growing fruit and vegetables.

With many of his gardens in London, planting for shade is something that he is becoming quite an expert in, with an ever-broadening palette of unusual and interesting plants that he takes pleasure in researching. 'I like

THIS PAGE FROM TOP The front of the property features clipped holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and a variety of seasonal plants in bespoke pots. The evergreen jasmine, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, frames the side door into the garden from the street. OPPOSITE A row of tall ceramic planters from Atelier Vierkant makes a strong statement along one side of the small courtyard, with the shiny-leaved *Arisaema ringens* at one end





going to the specialists to learn about different plants,' he says. 'We're talking to Jacques Amand about cypripedium and arisaema plants for example. And we called half the UK trying to source *Beesia calthifolia*, which is an amazing zero-maintenance plant for shade.' The more unusual plants are balanced by reliable shade-performers such as the evergreen jasmine, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle', both of which are used in the west London garden shown here to create a strong green framework.

'This is a garden we designed in Kensington with an enclosed courtyard at the back. While working on this, we saw an opportunity to "green up" the front and side of this corner property and installed a series of bespoke metal planters within the railings to make the most of the available space.' The planters contain column-clipped holm oaks under-planted with a carefully thought out sequence of seasonal plants to give year-round interest. At the back of the containers, evergreen *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum' (in summer) and *Sarcococca confusa* (in winter) create mounds of greenery, while at the front, the Australian climber *Hardenbergia violacea* is trained to spill downwards to weave through the railings. Throughout the year, different additions will pop up: alliums in spring, *Thalictrum delavayi* in summer and the elegant *Schizostylis coccinea* 'Pink Princess' in autumn, for example.

The courtyard, accessible through a side door into the street, was designed around an old fig tree, which is now pollarded each year to reveal the gnarled, sculptural trunk. Presiding over the garden on one side, it gave rise to an asymmetrical design, with billowing banks of hydrangeas along two sides and a row of stylish sand-coloured planters from Atelier Vierkant along the third side. 'I think symmetry makes a space feel smaller,' says Stefano. 'Within an asymmetric framework, you can create strong focal points or have just one feature area. In this garden, we've tried not to use too many different materials and colours: less is more.' The planters are repeated throughout the garden in different shapes, one used to make a bespoke firepit and the other a storage table – visually similar but with different functions. One of the most striking features of the garden is an elegant iroko timber wall. Designed by Stefano, its rotating oblong posts can be turned in different angles to catch light and shadow, forming a simple backdrop to the planting.

It is easy to become formulaic in designing urban gardens, but no two of Stefano's gardens are the same. 'I hate the copy-and-paste approach,' he says, and when he points out a special nicotiana in one of his client's gardens that he has nurtured from seed on his allotment, you know that he means what he says □

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Stefano Marinaz Landscape Architecture:
stefanomarinaz.com

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Solanum laxum* 'Album'. The far boundary of the courtyard has been transformed by a timber wall with rotating posts. Planters containing *Viola hederacea*, *Cypripedium formosanum* and *Cyclamen coum*. More Atelier Vierkant pots have been made into a fire pit and storage table. THIS PAGE FROM TOP Lush foliage at the front of the house. Bare holm oak trunks are softened by *Geranium* 'Rozanne'

