

HOLDING COURT

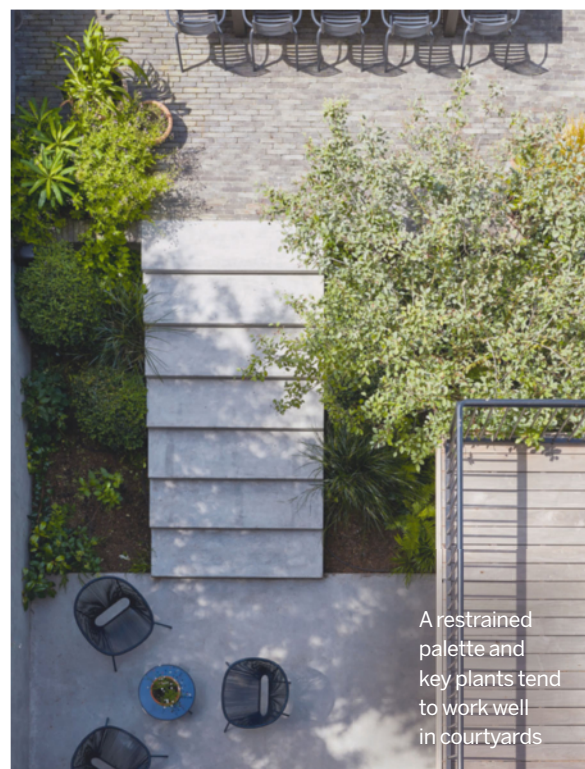
Charlotte Harris from landscape design practice Harris Bugg Studio talks courtyard gardens

Harris Bugg Studio's intimate, leafy courtyard for a stylish Holland Park townhouse

FEATURE JESSICA SALTER PHOTOGRAPHS (MAIN IMAGE)
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I LOVE the feeling of enclosure and privacy that a courtyard garden provides – like it’s a secret that one might stumble across. There’s something magical about it.

- Courtyard gardens really speak to my inner control freak; they are an opportunity to be incredibly precise in the design. In a way they are the hardest gardens to design; everything is on show.
- You shouldn’t try to do too much in a small space, you have to really focus on what is important. Restraint is key.
- The courtyard garden has to work in conjunction with the house; the building sets the tone, because you want the two spaces to be connected and seamless. You need to look out at it from the house and consider what you see from the windows, both on the ground floor and upstairs. It can often be totally different vistas, which you need to take into consideration.
- It’s really important to have good quality materials, so don’t scrimp on them. Natural materials often work best. We generally use beautiful natural stone, often reclaimed, clay pavers or reclaimed cobbles. It depends on what works best with the house. We were working on a project with the designer Rose Uniacke recently; inside she had designed oak floorboards, so outside we used handmade clay pavers and laid them in a herringbone pattern to provide an echo. That kind of detail really elevates a design.
- Generally, in a courtyard garden we would avoid a lawn – it always ends up being the size of a postage stamp – and go for interesting planting. Don’t make beds too small – they can look poky. Instead of planting one or two plants here and there, we go for multiples of five or seven and really go for it.
- I think a restrained colour palette works very well, focusing on key plants that work hard all season. Often courtyard gardens are very shady. I love grasses and ferns, and even evergreen jasmine. Really, jasmine prefers a sunny spot, but I have it in my garden on north- and east-facing walls, and while it doesn’t flower as much, the leaves are still very beautiful; the glossy leaf amplifies what little light there is around. Another favourite that I often use in a small spot is *Kirengeshoma palmata*: it has a lovely yellowy lemon flower and beautifully architectural-shaped leaves.
- Trees are really important. It might just be one tree, or the space could take a few to make you feel immersed. We love to use tree ferns because they handle shadier conditions, work with a wide range of palettes and you can buy them at all different heights and sizes.
- Consider your lighting carefully. You don’t want to feel like you’re on the runway of Gatwick Airport, so your lighting has to



A restrained palette and key plants tend to work well in courtyards

be very soft and restrained. I like uplighters with black or dark green fittings that disappear, and sometimes use candles in storm lanterns. In every aspect of your design, you want to feel calm and rested.

- If you want to increase the feeling of space, hang mirrors; pick frames that recede into the wall or fence, and you can even conceal them in foliage. They reflect the light and make the garden feel like it is limitless.
- Seating again has to be considered; don’t put too much in the garden and make sure what you do put in there is the best you can afford. We often go for antique furniture to add interest, but it shouldn’t steal the show. 🍷

STOCKISTS

For seeds, plants and garden tools, we use Great Dixter because it has the best selection, as well as the wonderful Beth Chatto garden centre for other plants. When we use garden furniture, we think you should get fewer pieces, but use your maximum budget; we like Lichen Garden Antiques for its selection of garden antiques, along with Vinterior. Terracotta pots can look beautiful in their simplicity; we go to Italian Terrace. For bronze and other beautiful metal pots we use Bronzino, which are all made by hand.