

# DESIGN SECRETS PART TWO

## BIG IDEAS SMALL SPACES

Tiny garden? Big furniture, clever landscaping and bold planting plus a few nifty designer tips will **SOLVE YOUR SPACE DILEMMAS**



**STRIKING** chairs are by [www.barbed.co.uk](http://www.barbed.co.uk)

Over the last 20 years, gardens in the UK have become smaller. According to the annual survey of the Horticultural Trades Association, the average British garden is now only 14m x 14m (46ft x 46ft) in size – about the size of a tennis court – and many of us, particularly in urban areas, have courtyards far smaller than that. But even though our outside spaces have shrunk, we can still think and act big, as long as we follow some key rules.

### KEEP THEM BOLD AND STRONG

Award-winning garden designer Kate Gould ([www.kategouldgardens.com](http://www.kategouldgardens.com)) is an expert at turning small spaces into showstoppers. “The best small spaces are bold and strong,” she says. “Supersizing most things is a trick I employ to avoid a scheme appearing bitty. Trying to achieve too much in a tiny area can result in a dilution of the overall effect; pare down the design, assess the absolute minimum that you need, and work from there.”

“Oversizing furniture and planters is an established design trick to make the space appear larger than it is,” she says.

“Limiting the colours used in a garden and keeping the planting to a minimum number of plants creates an open look and feel in a space which could easily look cluttered if you used too many different plants.”

These rules have been applied in the London townhouse garden shown here, designed by Caroline de Lane Lea and Louise Cummins of the Garden Makers ([www.garden-makers.co.uk](http://www.garden-makers.co.uk)). A large aged olive tree provides an arresting focal point. It is underplanted with lavender, hardy geraniums and penstemon.

Oversized lights create a dramatic feature, and help to make the space look bigger and more interesting when illuminated. Lightly coloured horizontal fencing means the garden appears larger, while the intricately patterned chairs and geometric table add texture. The lightly toned Belgian brick paving opens up the space further.

### LIGHTS

in unusual shapes look more dramatic when oversized.



PHOTOS: WWW.HELENICKLING.COM GARDEN DESIGN BY GARDEN MAKERS



**ADDING ATMOSPHERE** is essential for relaxed living. This small firepit doesn't dominate yet it helps to bring the space alive after dark.

**CREATIVE LIGHTING** will make the garden more attractive from inside the house as well as creating a cosy outdoor environment as the sun sets

**SPARING USE OF COLOUR** makes a small space look larger. The fence tones with the Belgian brick paving and pale foliage.

**UNDER PLANTING** the large olive with subtly toned purple penstemon and hardy geraniums highlights the tree still further.



**ONE LARGE TREE** looks more striking in a small space than lots of smaller scale plants.

## Top tips for tiny gardens

Follow designer Kate Gould's five ideas to make more of a small space:

- \* **USE LARGE TILES**  
so there are fewer joins to distract the eye. Large-format hard landscaping on the ground, unified boundaries, and pots and planters or water features and sculptures – all scaled to the furniture and floor tiles – make a more pleasing and spacious result.
- \* **LIGHT COLOURS**  
may help to make the space feel larger but are harder work to maintain.
- \* **DECKING WORKS WELL**  
if you can run it across the shortest distance from the house. It will elongate the space – just like wearing stripes!
- \* **ROTATE THE DESIGN**  
by 45° so that large planting pockets can be created in the corners. Pack them with climbers to mask tatty walls and hide neighbouring properties.
- \* **RAMP UP THE DRAMA**  
with lighting. You're viewing your garden from indoors most of the time in the UK so creative lighting will make the garden seem bigger and more interesting, casting shadows and creating textures.



BEFORE



AFTER

**VERSATILITY**  
is the watchword for this pergola. It's a play den as well as a grown-up area.

**HORIZONTAL**  
cladding evens out the mismatched brick walls and adds privacy.

**A FIRE PIT**  
that doubles as a table is a great space-saver.

**LARGE PAVING**  
slabs create more open space, making the surface area seem wider.

**GO BIG OR GO HOME**  
*Large items instantly make a small garden look a lot bigger than it really is*

**THINK 'LESS IS MORE'**

Turning the garden into an extra room was the challenge facing garden designer Karen McClure ([www.karenmcclure.co.uk](http://www.karenmcclure.co.uk)) when she developed a courtyard garden in a Victorian terrace in central Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

"The clients requested an open space that would extend and complement their new kitchen extension, creating a seamless inside/outside feel," explains Karen, who won a silver medal at Chelsea in 2004 and specialises in both big rural properties and small town plots.

"In such a small space, simplicity was key, so I went for the 'less is more' approach."

Large, oblong pavers unify the floor at ground level and link with the grey flooring in the kitchen/dining area inside the bifold doors. "I wanted to give the courtyard the feel of a trendy Ibiza lounge area, with a pergola to provide shade and screening," she says. "It gives vertical height and creates a 'zone' or room within the garden with a seating area that doubles up as a camp for the kids and provides a structure to suspend fairy lights."

**Supersized solutions**

Follow designer Karen McClure's tips for maximising your space:

- \* **CHOOSE BIG POTS** over lots of small ones – the bigger the better. Be bold.
- \* **PAVING AT AN ANGLE** helps add a feeling of width.
- \* **USE MIRRORS** to reflect light and add depth, but angle them slightly and blur reflections by planting in front of them.
- \* **LARGE PAVING SLABS** open up the space and make it appear bigger. Choose large plants such as *Eriobotrya japonica* rather than small, ground-hugging plants.

The planting includes trees and oversized architectural plants such as the strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), olive, loquat and multi-stem Amelanchier in big pots. The big plants, foliage and planters add a strong element of design to a previously unloved garden."

Horizontal cladding extends the height of the traditional brick wall and fills in a gap in the back wall has unified the previously mismatched boundaries. It will mellow over time to a silver-grey.

Big features such as the barbecue, the grey washed Cosicube Gas Fire Pit by Westminster – which doubles as a coffee table (£795, from [www.harrogateinteriors.co.uk](http://www.harrogateinteriors.co.uk)) – a large table and chairs and built-in seating continue the supersized theme. Karen says: "The outside is now a seamless transition from the beautiful interior the client had created."



**BUILT-IN**  
seating in a neutral colour is a stylish addition to this secluded corner.

**MAX UP A SKINNY SPACE**

RHS gold medal winner Tony Woods, founder of Garden Club London ([www.gardenclublondon.co.uk](http://www.gardenclublondon.co.uk)), says: "There is really only room for one or two big features in a small garden, but many people have 20 or 30 small things which aren't in sync with each other, such as pots, plants, ornaments and stuff they've collected over the years. Planning a small garden is almost like a diet. You have to make a plan and stick to it rigorously. You have to chuck out everything that's not essential and by doing that you get a lot more in."

Boundaries are key in a small plot. "We design a small garden so it has simple boundaries," he says. "We use a minimal fence or screen with a multi-stem tree in front, or a laser cut screen or decorative trellis with simple box balls in front – never both. If you keep it simple you make the boundaries look much less dominant. Keep them consistent and unite them by painting in the same neutral colour. If they're made of different materials, like wood and brick, that will create interest. Then, if you get the wall shrubs and climbers right – evergreens like climbing hydrangea – they will cover the fence."

A big challenge for Tony was to design a small, narrow plot in Fulham, London, only 3.5m wide. They kept the paving as simple as possible, using Indian sandstone in Kandla grey, which costs about £28 per sq metre. Larger paving means fewer joins so is less confusing to the eye.

"We stuck to two sizes of stone, 60cm x 60cm and 60cm x 90cm," he says. "It needs breaking up. If it was all the same size it would look a bit regimental. It isn't difficult to come up with a suitable design yourself. Some companies have paving layouts on their websites, which you can copy."

To make the garden feel bigger and create a calm backdrop for the creative planting, they clad the fences in Western red cedar, then painted the horizontal slats, and the built-in borders, the same soft neutrals as the interior of the client's home.

"We added mirrors on one side of the plot which reflect the foliage of olive trees in front of them and help to divide the space," he says. "Be careful where you position a mirror – you don't want them to reflect something unsightly like a drainpipe."

Narrow borders should be avoided, as plants will spill over and cover part of the plot, says Tony. "I got the big galvanised zinc, reclaimed planters from Anton & K ([www.antonandk.co.uk](http://www.antonandk.co.uk)), and below the olive trees I planted them with lavender, thyme and rosemary. Mediterranean herbs are good as these planters can get very hot and dry out – we line them with thick plastic.

"Small evergreen shrubs sit with a summer splash of cream hydrangea. The pom-pom trees on the boundary are lonicera, which have a crisp, tactile finish. They can be kept contained and the same size for 10 years or so.

"Entertaining is a priority for the client, so bespoke furniture was designed, including a bench with concealed storage. The new table was made-to-measure of reclaimed planks and seats up to 12."



BEFORE



AFTER

**KEEP IT SIMPLE**  
*Use one colour of paint to unite different materials for a relaxing vibe*

WORDS: MELANIE WHITEHOUSE PHOTOS: KAREN MCCLURE, MARIANNE MAJERUS

GARDEN DESIGN BY TONY WOODS