Belgian Sensibility

Landscape architect Jonathan Snow brings the style of Belgian gardens to a tiny west London plot

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Pauline Heerema wanted a garden in the Belgian style and found the perfect person to make it happen. On moving to her house and garden in west London in 2012, Pauline appointed an architect to advise on some improvements to the house, who in turn recommended landscape architect Jonathan Snow (above) to design the garden.

"I had a picture in mind of the garden I wanted," says Pauline. "The Belgian style for me involves a lot of structure. It is a style that is calming and 'readable'. You don't get distracted by looking at a garden in this style."

As serendipity would have it, Jonathan was familiar with the Belgian style and saw the vision that Pauline had set her heart on for the small, almost square urban space. It turned out to be the perfect match. "He knew exactly what I was talking about," says Pauline.

Pauline had used Belgian landscape architect and topiary specialist Jacques Wirtz to design a previous garden and consequently wanted topiary to form the backbone of the space. "I had used the concept before and I knew what I wanted. A garden that was very full and very sculptural – it works so well," says Pauline. "One of the neighbours even commented that they thought the garden was a Wirtz design,

which I take as the highest compliment," remarks Jonathan.

As well as having a picture of the garden in mind, Pauline didn't want to wait for the result, preferring to have a near-instant, mature garden. The garden is viewed from a raised ground floor indoors, so Jonathan had to ensure that it would have impact when seen as a whole from within, rather than being a garden that hides some of its facets, demanding further inspection in order for the complete picture to be revealed. His task was the horticultural equivalent of painting a picture in the morning and hanging it in the drawing room in the afternoon.

Part of the brief also centred on Pauline having more downtime in the house in winter, so the garden needed to look attractive during this time. "Clients often want the garden to look good all year, which inevitably means that you have to sacrifice some colour because evergreens have to be relied on to a certain extent in winter," explains Jonathan.

To create the desired instant effect in this garden, evergreen box balls had to be lifted over the house by crane, with the road closed off to allow the installation, no small undertaking. All the plants were rootballed – the roots packed with soil and covered with sacking – to ensure minimum of shock to the specimens making their sky-high ascent into their new surroundings.

Right A path of intricate pavers leads through box balls and containers of *Sedum*, lavender and white hydrangeas.
Below right The front garden mirrors the back, with a similar design.
Below left *Agapanthus* and box surround a contemporary minimalistic water feature with clean lines.

The garden is overlooked from Pauline's study and she was keen that it should feel like an extension of the interior. The colour palette of the flowering plants has been chosen to complement those inside the house, something that Jonathan considers very important. "It is vital to see what is going on in the house before you design the garden," he says.

"There are old reclaimed oak floorboards in the house so I chose to reflect this in the design, with the Dutch pavers in the garden," he explains. Jonathan first saw the pavers in a Chelsea garden designed by Tom Stuart Smith and chose them after originally being asked to use cobbles as a surface material. Pauline told Jonathan that she didn't want straight edges in the garden, and these intricate, yet imperfect pavers perfectly combine sophistication with the soft but unfussy mood she sought.

Although the garden is designed to be viewed as a whole from indoors, closer scrutiny does reveal detail not obvious at first glance. "I was keen to add some character and age to the garden," says Jonathan. The clay pavers add layers of detail to the bold, full-on evergreens that dominate the landscape at first glance. Thirty-year-old espaliered pear trees line the perimeter of the garden, their gnarled trunks, adding age and intrigue to a garden that has a fresh 'new' feel at first glance. Also used in the front garden – designed and built in 2016 – their blossom adds a refreshing splash of intricacy to the bold, broad, simple shapes of the design.

Above right Large box balls in the back garden were craned over the house into position.
Left Espaliered pears around the boundary provide screening and delicate, contrasting blossom in spring.

FACT FILE

■ **Aggregate** by Breedon Group. Tel: 01332 694010; breedongroup.com

■ **Containers** by Ateliervierkant. Tel: +32 (0)50 370056; ateliervierkant.com

■ **Dutch Pavers** by Vandemoortel. Tel: 020 3633 2422; vandemoortel.co.uk

■ **Furniture** by Sempre. Tel: +32 (0)1428 3636; sempre.be

■ **Design** by Jonathan Snow Design. Tel: 020 7371 9475; jonathansnowdesign.co.uk

■ **Lights** by Charles Edwards. Tel: 020 7736 8490; charlesedwards.com

Design Details

Planting

The predominant colour scheme includes subtle shades of purple and pink to stay in keeping with the understated feel of the garden. In summer *Agapanthus*, lavender and hydrangeas provide the bulk of the colour in containers, while earlier in the year *Allium* bulbs, which are replanted each year, add similar shades to brighten the evergreen landscape gently. With so many mature evergreens, trees and feature plants in pots, a drip irrigation system runs throughout the garden.

Paving

The beauty of the narrow Dutch pavers is that they provide flexibility in terms of the shapes that can be created at ground level. Jonathan uses them to create curved paths that contrast with the small aggregate that is used at the base of the many containers in the garden. They also bring a rough touch of character to a garden that is very sleek overall. "The pavers have a slightly weathered, 'not quite perfect' look, which reflects the flooring in the interior," says Jonathan.

Containers

Jonathan chose a variety of container sizes but the majority are tall, so that the plants they hold can be well elevated, making them more prominent features in the design. The containers are connected to a drip system and programmed so that the plants receive water at least every seven days.

Walls

The garden is on a slope and had to be terraced when work began in 2012, with the addition of retaining walls. Pauline says the cream walls in the garden have an almost Tuscan feel about them. "I like the walls because they have an earthy feel to them," she says. The walls were a replacement for existing municipal red brick walls, which didn't fit in with the brief on Pauline's arrival.

Hedges

Both the hedging and the espaliered pear trees that run along the garden boundary on one side had to be crane-lifted into the property because there was no entry point large enough for these specimen plants, which were mature when added to the garden. The established yew instantly created a moody backdrop for the garden, which in turn lights up the plants and features around it and makes them stand out more.

Water feature

It was Jonathan's idea to install a contemporary water feature to act as an understated centrepiece in the garden. "I ended up with an obvious spot in the middle of the garden to put the water feature. It just happened naturally as I was drawing the plan for the space," he explains. "It is very easy when you're designing in a small space to end up pushing everything to the sides of the garden, leaving an empty space in the middle. But I wanted to make sure I had filled the space." ∎

Top Using a container with height means it will not be dwarfed by the neatly espaliered pears lining the boundary. **Above** A slick water feature ensures the middle of the garden is not an empty void. **Left** Small pavers can be laid in almost any shape or pattern.