



FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Designer Maitanne Hunt had her mettle tested when she built this dramatic roof terrace, seven storeys up – with no lift – in Kensington, west London

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The brief

Roof terraces are always a challenge but this one, seven floors up with no lift, in the narrow streets of Kensington, west London, was trickier than most. Originally two separate terraces, they had been combined some years ago via an awkward connecting passageway around a void, which takes the eye towards street level in a vertiginous plunge. "But the views out across London are fantastic," says garden designer Maitanne Hunt, "and my clients – a couple with adult children – wanted to use this as a space to entertain." Since they regularly host up to 50 guests, space for circulation was key, as was lighting; and decking planks with spacing too narrow for stiletto heels to get caught in (a common problem with the previous ipe boards). The client was also keen to retain her existing furniture and to incorporate some oleanders (*Nerium oleander*) to remind her of her childhood in the South of France.

The design

Two beautiful multi-stemmed junipers (*Juniperus x pfitzeriana* 'Hetzii') are the anchor points for the design, and the inspiration from which everything else flows. "The clients have a lot of contemporary art in their apartment and I knew that these trees, with their twisting trunks, would make a similar statement on the terrace," says Maitanne. A focal point from inside, they also help detract attention from the void, and anchor the main 'drawing room' area, shading a small sofa. This faces another seating area, where a cleverly placed mirror allows guests to observe the trees as they relax: 'It's almost like a moving painting,' says Maitanne. The other side of the space has been delineated as a dining area with a table and chairs nestled among potted *Osmanthus x burkwoodii*.

The other salient feature of the space is the terracotta chimney pots, "so many I was immediately put in mind of *Mary Poppins*," says Maitanne. She used their textures and colours as her cue for



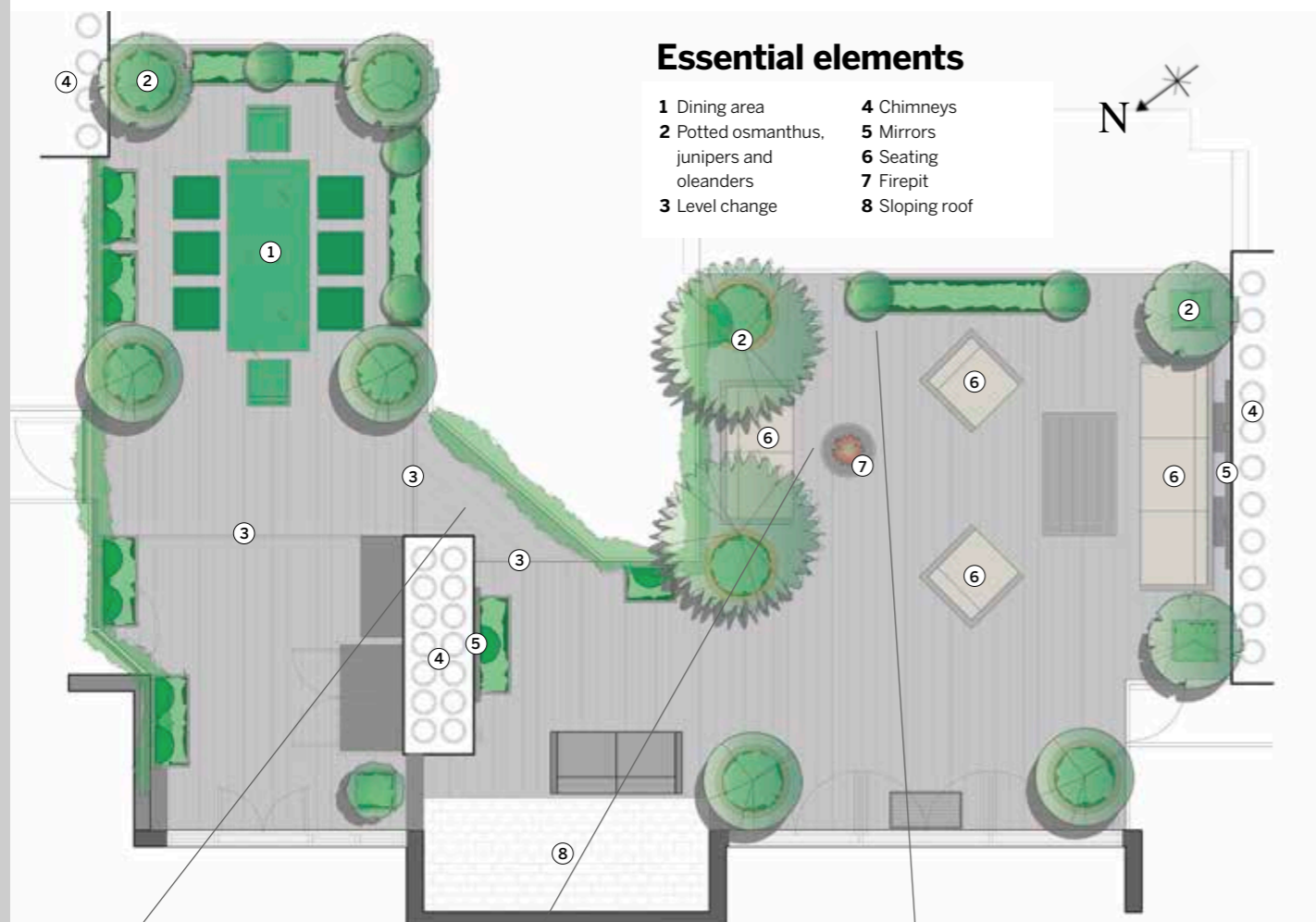
Left Two sculptural juniper trees form the focal point of this roof terrace. Combined with evergreen planting including multi-stemmed *Osmanthus x burkwoodii* and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, they create a lush, welcoming space, despite the exposed site.

Above Mirrors, framed in wood a similar colour to that of the decking, are used almost as 'living picture frames' giving novel perspectives on the planting and the streetscapes beyond.

the pots and the flashes of colour in the planting, which features vibrant *Geum* 'Mrs J Bradshaw' and plummy *Verbascum* 'Petra'.

The apparently simple design belies the huge amount of planning, logistics and project management work that went into it. A structural engineer was needed to work out the load-bearings. The subframe beneath the original ipe boards was rotten, and once this was removed, the roof was also found to be in poor condition and needed repairs before work could begin. With no lift, and the streets too narrow to allow a crane, Maitanne had to erect a scaffolding tower to bring up a hoist with which to winch materials up to site. Throughout, the building's management company, caretaker and all neighbours had to be kept posted on progress – and Maitanne found herself on site, climbing all those stairs, almost every day.

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DECKING DECISION

For the decking, Maitanne has used EnviroBuild composite Pioneer boards, which are composed of around 90 per cent recycled materials, have a lower carbon footprint than timber, and are splinter-free and fade-resistant. The narrow shadow gaps avoid trapped high heels, while the dark Stone hue is a good foil to the brick and soaks up some of the sun's rays.



REVAMPED SEATING

This inviting seating area under the junipers features a pre-existing sofa, which was repaired and finished with new upholstery to complement the terrace's design. The cushions are rain-resistant and are covered in outdoor fabrics from Pierre Frey, JAB and Samuel & Sons. The sculptural Hemi firebowl (which has a lid so it can double as a coffee table) is from Solus Decor.



PERFECT PLANTERS

Since this is a roof terrace, all planting is in planters. Maitanne used a mix of pre-existing water troughs, which she had cleaned and resprayed with RAL 7013 ("A brownish, grey-green colour that blends well with plants," says Maitanne), and new planters from Torc Pots. The junipers sit in tall, narrow Kyna pots, while the osmanthus are in its more rounded Kari design.

The dining area

More intimate than the drawing room terrace, the dining terrace is a calm, green haven surrounded by shrubs of *Osmanthus x burkwoodii* large enough to make the space feel enclosed, but airy enough – thanks to their multi-stemmed form – not to block the views. A large area of *Trachelospermum jasminoides* covers some of the party wall, adding to the sense of enclosure. The contemporary aluminium furniture is by French company Fermob ("It'll last 25 years without you having to lift a finger," says Maitanne), which comes in a huge range of colours. Here, Maitanne has chosen two different shades of green – one selected to complement that of the cupola beyond – to keep the restful feel while also injecting an extra dash of interest.

The lighting

As this was destined to be a space for entertaining, getting the lighting right was always going to be crucial. To do this, Maitanne worked with lighting designers John Cullen who devised a sophisticated, subtle scheme that adds atmosphere and drama to the space. "The trees and the step between the seating and dining area are lit," says Maitanne, "but so are other, more unexpected elements such as the pots themselves (highlighting their beautiful texture), the coffee table, which is lit from underneath, and the mirrors, which are backlit." Since all the cabling lies beneath the decking, and the uplighters for the pots are inserted into the boards, the positioning had to be absolutely exact from the outset.

The planting

The main planting challenge was how safely to accommodate the two juniper trees on the edge of the terrace. "They have a beautifully wide canopy, which is lovely for shade, but can also act like a sail," explains Maitanne, "so I worked with the structural engineer to devise a way to anchor the pots through the decking and to the subframe beneath. They're not going to move a millimetre."

Chosen for their drought- and wind-tolerance and their blue-grey foliage, the junipers combine with the other evergreen plants to create a lush, verdant scene that invites the owners outdoors, even on the hottest day. This is helped by exuberant underplanting: a frothy mix of glaucous-leaved *Euphorbia myrsinites*, *Helianthemum 'Wisley Pink'* and *Erigeron karvinskianus*, as well as feature planters incorporating prairie plants and grasses, including *Echinacea purpurea*, *Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hameln'* and *Sanguisorba 'Tanna'*. These cope well with the harsh conditions of a roof terrace. The grasses, in particular, add movement to the space.

Trachelospermum jasminoides is trained up walls and along the railings (again, to disguise the view of the void below) and, with the osmanthus, also contributes another important aspect to this garden: scent. "As you move through to the dining area when one of the two is in flower, the perfume just washes over you like a wave," says Maitanne.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Maitanne Hunt Gardens & Landscapes at maitannehunt.com