



Angus's green-roofed studio sits behind geometric layers of planting, including a hornbeam hedge and a rectangular section of meadow turf. A multi-stemmed *Parrotia persica* rises up from the meadow

# Long division

At his Oxford home, landscape and garden designer Angus Thompson has divided a rectangular former timber yard into geometric sections, with a lawn, meadow and seating areas, to create a garden that feels perfectly lived in

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PHOTOGRAPHS RACHEL WARNE

**F**or a garden designer, there is no better experience than to design, build and plant your own garden from scratch. It was a logical step for Angus Thompson, as he had also overseen the building of his house on the site of a former timber yard in north Oxford, where he now lives with his wife and children. Once the timber-framed house was up, it left a rectangular garden space – 23 metres by 12 metres – for Angus to play with. Not only did he have to find a solution that suited himself, but he also had to keep the family happy.

'I love finding the simplest, purist response to a site,' says Angus, 'and this garden needed to be simple, because it's not a huge space. However, we've also got three kids and a dog to accommodate, so I had to take this into account.' Divided neatly into geometric sections, with a seating area near the house, a lawn, small meadow area and a studio office at the far end, the garden seems bigger than it really is. The eye is drawn to the horizontal lines that run across the space – the square of lawn inset with the rectangular section of meadow, the hornbeam hedge that separates the studio space from the rest of the garden – avoiding what Angus calls the 'runway effect' of a long,





*'The interest in a garden's design comes from the juxtaposition of a rigorous structure with something a bit more badly behaved'*



OPPOSITE  
CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT The back  
of the timber-framed  
eco newbuild sports  
another green roof.  
Wine-coloured  
monarda and  
sanguisorba stand  
out against a  
rendered wall. The  
bench was made from  
recycled decking.  
*Stipa gigantea*.  
Angus's family  
enjoying the garden.  
THIS PAGE FROM  
TOP A pot by Atelier  
Vierkant is used as  
a water feature. A  
*Parrotia persica*  
tree in the meadow

narrow garden. 'In larger gardens, I can afford to look at the interplay between curves and straight lines, but in smaller gardens a simple geometry is more appropriate – cleaner.'

In keeping with this uncluttered approach, both the hard landscaping materials and the planting palette are kept to a minimum. Compacted gravel was used at both ends of the garden to create seating areas, with a path made from tumbled York stone setts linking both ends. The benches were made from recycled timber decking that came from Angus's 2009 gold-medal-winning Chelsea garden, while the studio was constructed from cement particle board, an industrial material that had been used as a fireproof layer within the house. 'We were going to clad it in timber, but we had a budget to keep to,' says Angus. 'It's a bit brutalist but I love its colour – grey is so easy to plant against.' The battleship grey of the structure is softened by a hirsute green roof of meadow turf, the mirror image of which can be found on the back of the house.

To reflect the contemporary feel, the planting includes a deliberately limited collection of trees, perennials and grasses, plus a handful of self-seeders to keep things interesting. 'I think of the planting in layers, so the first things that go down on paper are the hedges and trees – the things that are integral to the structure of the design – and then different layers, from structural grasses to the dynamic self-seeders. But plants are never the starting point of my design – structure always comes first. The interest in a garden's design comes from the juxtaposition of a rigorous structure with something a bit more badly behaved.'

There isn't a huge amount that is badly behaved in Angus's garden – self-seeding crigeron, bronze fennel, *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost' and *Dianthus cruentus* are about as dangerous as you get – but Angus's experiments with meadow and green-roof planting threaten to shatter the order that the hornbeam hedges and beautiful multi-stemmed *Parrotia persica* convey.

Above all, this is a garden that is well used. Meadow plants bounce back after the dog tears through chasing a cat and the few plants near the house – calamagrostis, sanguisorba, monarda and echinacea – are tough enough to withstand a frequent battering from a football. 'I really do think that a garden just designed to be seen from a window is half a garden,' says Angus. 'A garden is meant to be a space that human beings interact with. If you've got people in it, using it, it comes alive' □

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