

# Creating a space for cooking and living

This large suburban garden transformation offers  
places to grow, eat and relax

There is plenty of  
room for cooks, diners  
and plantaholics!



IN THE GARDEN WITH...  
Adam and Toma Sierakowski



**LOCATION:** Chelmsford, Essex  
**LOOK:** Modern  
**SIZE:** 786sq m  
**ASPECT:** East facing  
**SOIL:** Originally Essex clay soil - now imported improved soil

This large Essex garden belongs to two very keen gardeners, Adam and Toma Sierakowski. While developing their gorgeous and productive vegetable garden, they made do with an overlooked and uninviting patio with a crumbling brick barbecue they inherited when they moved here nine years ago. But, after a significant redesign they can now relax in this beautifully modern outdoor living and cooking space surrounded by Mediterranean style planting and enjoy the fruits of their labour. "We basically wanted

*"We basically wanted to recreate that holiday feeling when at home!"*

**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** This teak bench is sheltered by potted acers; a double egg chair is given a sunny spot for snoozing on the porcelain patio; the productive area includes a raised bed for strawberries; geometric lines are made with both hard and soft landscaping, with pleached beech acting as living sculptures

to recreate that holiday feeling when at home!" says Adam.

This 90-year-old detached family home in a suburban area of Chelmsford came with a very large plot that would be daunting to many. However, Adam and Toma, who live here with their two children, Jasper and Esme, love nothing more than to be outside tending the garden together. "We both spent time as kids helping our parents in our gardens. When we bought the house together the garden was a mess, it had been left to go wild and was completely uncared for," Adam explains. "We've pretty much



PHOTOS: GARDEN PHOTOS; KIRSTY MCNEIL O'CONNOR; DESIGN: SEAN BUTLER/CUBE 1997 LTD



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Stipa 'Pony Tails' gracefully softens the edge of the porcelain tiles; the beautiful rambling rose arch leading to the productive garden; the garden is now separated into different zones to suit the needs of the family; the garden was largely lawn before the makeover

planted every plant there is and learnt as we go. You get to know the conditions that each plant likes and how to maintain them. We are out in the garden almost every weekend."

After a lot of research online the couple found local Essex garden designers Cube 1994. "Before we got in touch with them we had pretty much sorted out the lawn and borders. However, the patio area by the house remained a mish-mash of paving with an old brick barbecue left over from the previous owners. It was also overlooked from next door. It wasn't particularly inviting to

spend time in! We wanted more privacy, with a space to entertain without being overlooked. Large patio areas, one for an outdoor kitchen and dining table and the other for enjoying the sunshine in the morning. We really wanted plenty of plant interest whilst keeping a fairly large lawn area for our children to play in."

The couple had gathered some style inspiration by researching garden designers' Instagram profiles and visiting the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. "We initially had a meeting with Cube's MD Sean Butler and

they sent us some plans and a computer simulated video 'walkthrough' of the proposed design. It was pretty much spot on, first time!" says Adam.

Recalling his first site visit, Sean recalls: "The garden featured a predominantly lawned area with a traditional sandstone patio adjacent to the house.

"The clients had recently completed planting in the border areas on either side, and were keen to see these integrated into the overall design as fully as possible. We divided the garden into distinct zones to suit

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The garden has  
distinct zones to suit  
the family's lifestyle

the family's lifestyle: a sunny spot for morning coffee, a dining and outdoor kitchen area for entertaining, a relaxing evening space with a fire bowl, and a large lawn retained for football and trampolining. The outdoor kitchen was retrofitted later in the year, and the pergola is scheduled to be installed at a future date."

A spacious patio now wraps around the house, allowing seamless access from the bifold doors to a generous outdoor kitchen and dining area, ideal for year-round entertaining. Surrounding planting softens



**TOP** A corten steel fountain in the mixed border  
**ABOVE** Climbing beans in the productive garden



**ABOVE** Turtle planters filled with brachyscome decorate the dining table for a touch of both beauty and quirk

and encloses the space, while a corten steel water feature, positioned in the central bed, adds a calming, natural ambience to both sides of the terrace.

The garden was overlooked by the neighbouring properties on the left side. Pleached *Fagus sylvatica* (beech) trees were added along the boundary to create an elegant, elevated screen above the fence line. "Pleached trees are an ideal solution for privacy in tighter/smaller spaces, as they provide height without occupying much ground space, allowing for underplanting with perennials to enhance and soften the planting beds," said Sean.

And, to the right, a raised patio offers a sunny morning coffee spot, nestled within



*"It's been such a surprise to see the number of butterflies visiting the garden"*

lush planting. A stepping stone path guides you down the garden to a series of feature pergola arches and a vibrant, high-impact planting zone. "Lush and towering planting can be used as screening and subtly define different patios. These elements help to further screen views from neighbouring properties," said Sean.

At the end of the path lies the evening retreat, designed for summer nights with a fire and to take advantage of the last of the twilight sun. Here, a swing chair faces both the children's lawn area and also the extended views toward the far end of this generously-sized garden.

The pale grey porcelain paving and off-white rendering of the house give a clean contemporary feel to the substantial suburban space. Lush planting and the bold wooden 'arches' help to create a feeling of separate zones. The rose arch invites you into the existing vegetable garden that has been subtly and effectively linked to the new. A gravel access area into the vegetable garden is in keeping with the rest of the design and finishes the lawn with corten steel edging. This walkway gives Adam and Toma the perfect route to deliver freshly picked produce directly to the outdoor kitchen for cooking.

"We grow lots of food: tomatoes, peppers, beans, courgettes, strawberries, gooseberries, blackberries. The only thing we can't seem to grow are raspberries - they don't seem to like the soil!" says Adam. "We

love cooking outdoors. The flavour you get from cooking on a barbecue can't be beaten. Porchetta is really good on the rotisserie; the secret is to use a meat thermometer. We also cook a lot of the fresh vegetables picked from our garden. Vegetable kebabs are great. We do like to get family and friends over at weekends for a barbecue."

Cube worked with Adam and Toma on the planting plan but this green-fingered couple planted everything themselves. "We do almost all of the gardening," says Adam. "It's just about at the limit of what we can cope with. In the spring and summer there's pretty much something that needs doing every day. But we love it. We do have a gardener to cut the hedges though - I'm terrified of injuring myself on the electric hedge trimmers! The main garden borders have plenty of roses, which seem to love the Essex soil and it's been such a surprise to see the number of butterflies visiting the garden. They love the *Verbena bonariensis*, it's amazing. In autumn you can see that the grasses become more dominant."

With plans for a pergola over the outdoor kitchen for shade and shelter from the rain, Adam and Toma look forward to year-round cooking outdoors. "We are absolutely delighted with the garden now. We are using the outdoor kitchen area a lot, even in bad weather because we love BBQ food. And we love sitting outside in the new patio area drinking coffee in the morning, and we just love the water feature, it's so relaxing." 🌿