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# House Beautiful

OCTOBER 2025

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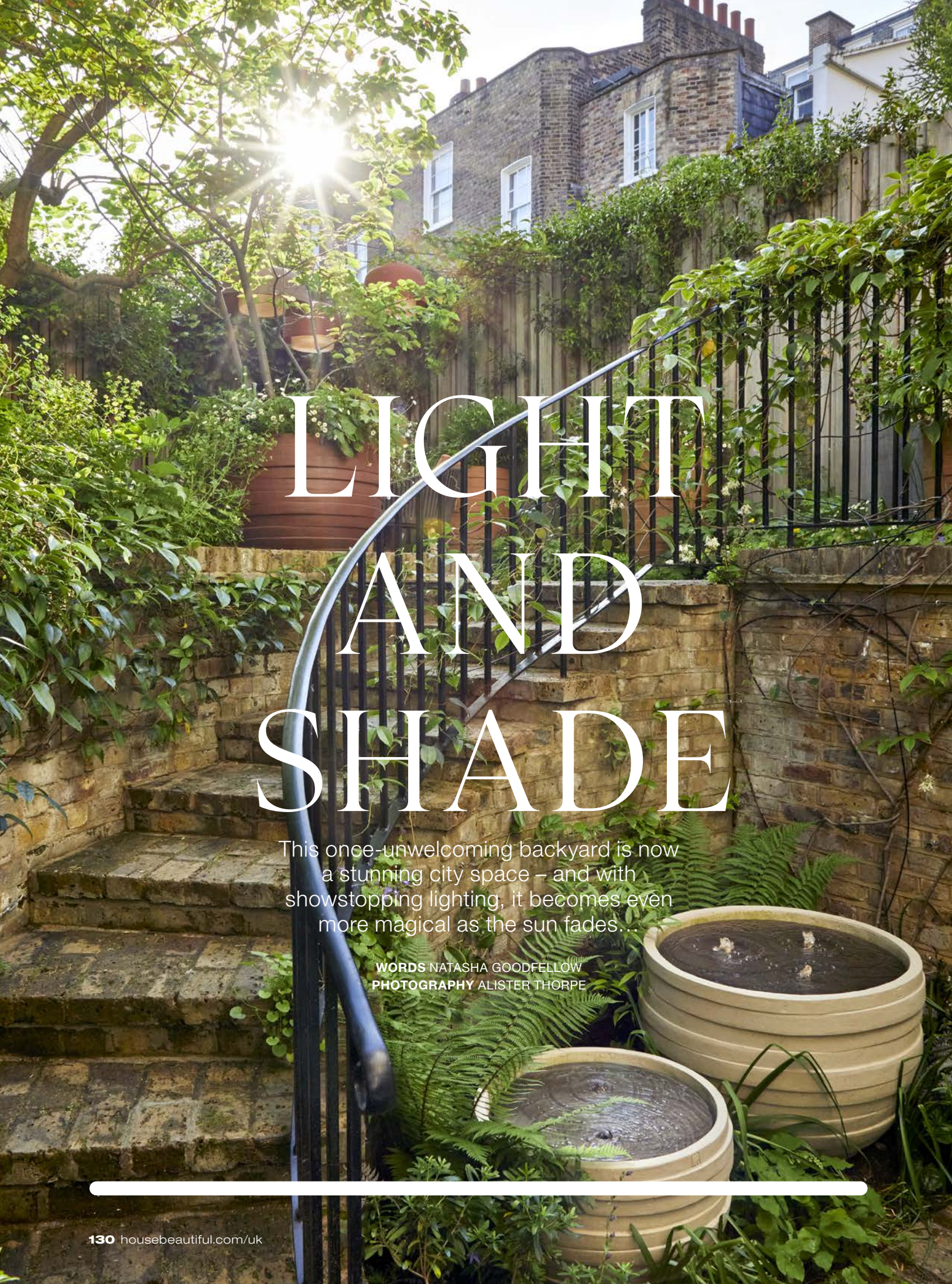
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# LIGHT AND SHADE

This once-unwelcoming backyard is now a stunning city space – and with showstopping lighting, it becomes even more magical as the sun fades...

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PHOTOGRAPHY ALISTER THORPE



Opposite Greenery bridges the divide between the two levels of the garden **This page** Large planters overflow with geraniums and *Erigeron karvinskianus*





**This picture** The dining area looks beautiful from within the house  
**Right** A boldly coloured slipper orchid



### THE NEW DESIGN

A certain amount of paving had to be retained to allow access to the stairs going to the lower level and for the dining area. Nevertheless, Stefano managed to reduce the paving by more than half, with expanded planting beds giving much more visual interest.

To address the sense of scale, he has employed a number of clever techniques. These include using tall pots to raise the planting and the water features closer to eye-level, allowing the small multi-stemmed tree *Amelanchier lamarckii* to create a mid-layer between the catalpa and the perennials, and, of course, striking hanging pendant lights from Paola Lenti.

'We were planning to install vertical wires on the fencing to train climbers up, and I thought, why not continue them across the space and use them for the lamps?' says Stefano. 'It creates a sense of intimacy but because the fences are so tall, the lampshades are still high enough to walk underneath.'

While the layout of the garden is relatively simple, it's the details that elevate it. The fencing – another of Stefano's innovations – is a case in point. Rather than consisting of flat panels, it has been made of varying widths and thicknesses of iroko timber, and these different depths create subtle areas of light and shade as the sun moves around the garden. Closer inspection also reveals that some of the posts are not wood at all but textured bronze panels, a subtle link with some of the finishes inside the house. This material connection is continued in the bronze fish, which the clients had bought on impulse without knowing exactly where it would go, and which Stefano felt would work well in the garden. Instead of opting for a standard solid plinth, he has mounted it on a thin rod, with the enchanting result that it appears to swim and dart above and through the leaves of the plants.

### THE PLANTING

Although the planting area is relatively small, Stefano has found space for as many plants as possible, many of them evergreen to ensure year-round interest. A white-flowered camellia hedge forms the north-facing boundary, while the fragrant broad-leaved sausage vine (*Holboellia latifolia*) twines around the balustrade and →



THE STRIKING  
PENDANT LIGHTS  
FROM PAOLA LENTI  
BRING A COSY FEEL  
TO THE DINING AREA

It's not often that you see pendant lights in a garden, but it shows how successful a small space can be when it's devoted to a single function – in this case, outdoor dining rather than the usual 'dining/cooking/sunbathing/somewhere for children to play' wishlist that so often ends in compromise. That said, creating this intimate little extra 'room' out of a previously inhospitable area was no easy task, but thanks to some eye-catching lighting, eating outside here can now continue well into autumn and the dining area looks equally beautiful when viewed from inside the house.

### THE CHALLENGES

This garden in west London was almost entirely paved, apart from a bed around the large catalpa tree at the rear, and had dilapidated fences smothered in ivy. Unusually tall, these were 2.5 metres rather than the standard 1.8-2 metres and, although they provided some welcome privacy from the adjacent houses, their height meant they felt overbearing rather than cocooning.

The space is on two levels and on the lower area was a neglected pond that added very little, being almost completely invisible from inside the house. Despite all this, garden designer Stefano Marinaz recognised the possibilities. 'As soon as I saw the canopy of the catalpa, I was able to imagine the dappled shade it would provide, and I knew we'd be able to create a lush little pocket of forest,' he says.





This page and opposite, top  
Wires above the table are covered  
in climbers and are perfect to  
hang the lamps from, making  
them seem as if they are floating  
Opposite, below Chocolate vine

scrambles up the retaining wall behind the water features. The chocolate-scented *Akebia quinata* climbs along the rear fence, with *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Schisandra rubriflora* creeping along the other side and on the wires holding the lamps. The latter is a particularly effective choice as the crimson, cup-shaped flowers resemble little lamps.

Given the size of the canopy of the catalpa tree, much of the planting has the feel of a woodland, with masses of shade-loving plants including evergreen fern *Polystichum polyblepharum*, the flowering *Rodgersia aesculifolia* and the heart-shaped leaves of *Beesia calthifolia* forming a lush textural backdrop to the scene-stealers such as purple slipper orchids (*Cypripedium formosanum*) and *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, which can grow to more than two metres in height.

On the sunnier side of the garden, five tall pots from Atelier Vierkant overflow with abundant *Geranium* 'Rozanne' and *Erigeron karvinskianus*.

### THE RESULT

With its hanging lamps and swimming fish, there's a magical feel to this garden, which envelops its occupants in its layers of planting and architectural interest. And it's a feeling that will only increase over time. As Stefano says, 'As the climbers grow, they will eventually cover the wires completely until the lights, like the fish, appear to float.'

To find out more about Stefano's work and to watch a masterclass on the creation of this garden, visit [stefanomarinaz.com](https://stefanomarinaz.com)



LIVING

## HOW TO LIGHT UP YOUR GARDEN

### ✱ Decide what you need

Do you want to highlight a feature, create a cosy glow around a table or light up pathways – or perhaps a bit of everything? There are lots of options, including pendant lights, tree/feature spotlights, perimeter/low-level path lighting and wall/doorway downlighters.

### ✱ Make it flexible

For maximum control, and to minimise light pollution, ensure your lights are on different circuits. That way you could, for example, choose to illuminate just a water feature or a sculptural tree to enhance the view from indoors. Dimmable lights on a timer will give you extra flexibility.

### ✱ Think green

Choose LED lights, which are more energy-efficient and last longer. And, where possible, minimise the use of uplighters – for trees and sculptures, for example – as these can disrupt nesting birds. Placing them amid foliage, where their light will be dispersed, can create an atmospheric feel in the garden.