

Canal dreams

Tim Richardson visits a garden near Amsterdam whose small size and right-angled shape posed a challenge for designer Lodewijk Baljon. Photographs Maayke de Ridder

IN BRIEF

- **WHAT:** L-shaped suburban garden.
- **WHERE:** Haarlem, the Netherlands.
- **SOIL:** a mixture of sand and peat.
- **CLIMATE:** cool summer and mild winters; regular rainfall.
- **SIZE:** 800 square metres.
- **DESIGNER:** Lodewijk Baljon (see profile, overleaf).



LEFT: Reflected light brightens the garden, while falling water makes a soothing sound.
THIS PICTURE: The large raised terrace looks on to the water.



As the price of land soars at the edges of attractive historic towns, the temptation has arisen for many property owners to sell off a portion of their garden to make way for a new house. This can be a lucrative business, but there is a downside. You can end up with a garden that is unusually shaped and tricky to landscape. Dutch designer Lodewijk Baljon was asked to take on one such project in a suburb of the pleasant town of Haarlem, some 20 miles west of Amsterdam.

The owners had acquired a quietly attractive red brick house, circa 1910, which had already lost a large chunk of its garden. The result is that not only are the neighbours disconcertingly close, but the remaining garden space is out of scale with the building. After the land sale, what was left was a garden comprising strips to a depth of around 10.5m at the sides and back, and considerably tighter at the front.

Lodewijk's solution to this spatial problem was ingenious. To begin with, he considered the character of his clients, Roelof and Sherry Prins. Roelof, an old friend from school days, is gregarious and likes entertaining, so Lodewijk knew that some kind of party space was in order. In a move that only a professional designer would have the

confidence to make, Lodewijk suggested a wide, L-shaped, raised terrace on two elevations, taking up almost half the depth of the garden. Lodewijk paraphrases the American designer Thomas Church approvingly: 'When in doubt, make it bigger'. This terrace now provides up to four dining and sitting spaces, in shade or sun, with an English Arts and Crafts feel – roses and wisteria on the walls and lavender against the house. The choice of material is also bold: a bright yellow-orange form of quartzite laid as a sort of superior crazy paving, with a yellow sand infill in which thyme thrives. Lodewijk calls this 'sun-seeking stone' in a garden where shadow is a potential problem.

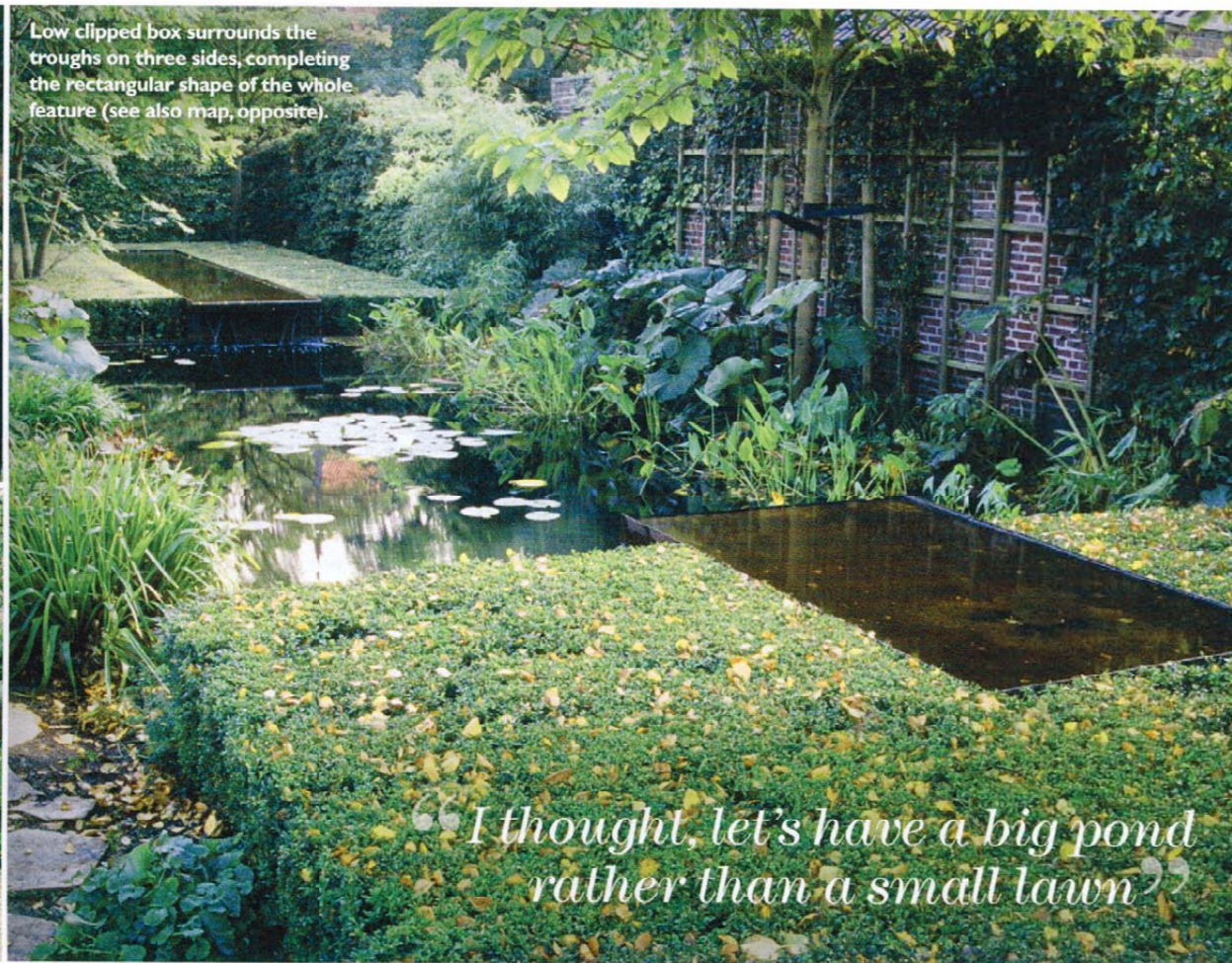
Lush planting

Beyond and below this terrace is the garden proper. The larger area, southwest of the house, is a mass of herbaceous greenery with sparks of bright colour created by cranesbill geraniums (predominantly), plenty of great wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*), hydrangeas (including *H. macrophylla* 'Geoffrey Chadbund'), ferns, hostas (*H.* 'Royal Standard' and *H.* 'Sum and Substance'), lesser periwinkle (*Vinca*

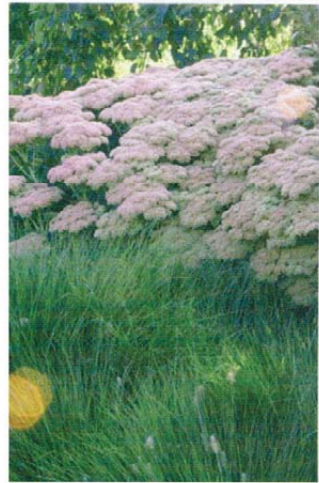
RIGHT, FROM TOP: The large seed pods of *Koeleria paniculata* make a fine show in the autumn; a path made of quartzite shards leads to the canal; *Hydrangea quercifolia* adds colour to the greenery southwest of the house; the water lily *Nymphaea 'Virginalis'* has a long flowering season.



Low clipped box surrounds the troughs on three sides, completing the rectangular shape of the whole feature (see also map, opposite).



I thought, let's have a big pond rather than a small lawn



▷ *minor*), *Actaea*, fuchsia (*F. magellicana* var. *gracilis*), glossy-leaved rhododendrons and climbing roses with clematis on four substantial wooden supports that march across the width of the space and connect with the terrace at eye level. The roses include classics such as *Rosa* 'Cécile Brunner', *R.* 'Blush Noisette' and *R.* 'New Dawn'.

Different angles

The backdrop to all this used to be a yew hedge, until a neighbour unexpectedly removed it. Lodewijk replaced it with a tall screen of bamboo, which he prefers – “A much lighter green, a rougher texture but with movement”. This space is anchored by a tall liquidambar recently planted in its centre, and Lodewijk also plans to convert the wooden rose supports into one end of a pergola, extending it to create a replacement garaging area. This will “glue the whole thing together,” he says.

A space of these odd proportions creates an unusual situation: a garden that is defined by its right angles. Rather than hide this, Lodewijk has made the most of it by laying a dead-straight path of quartzite shards through the south

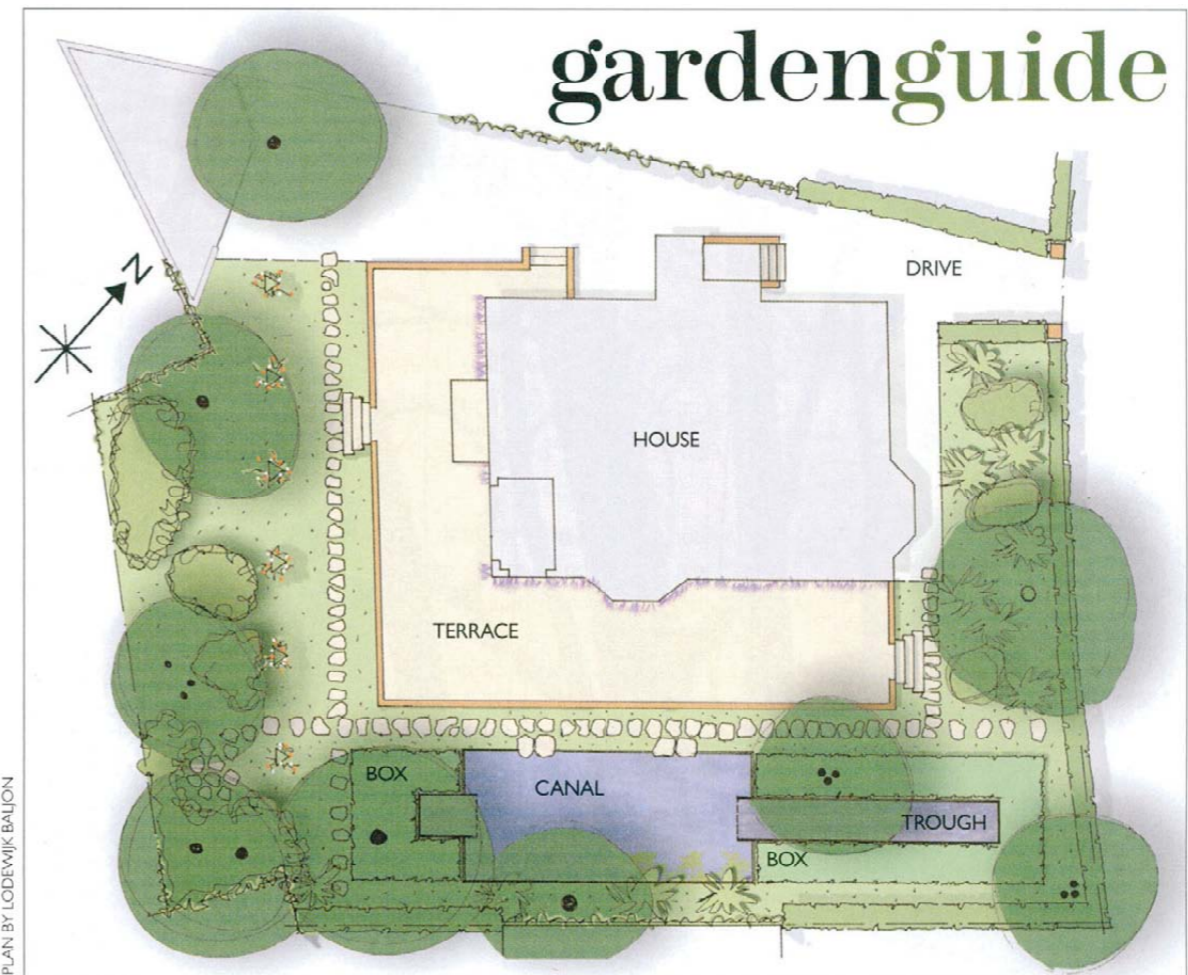


LEFT, FROM TOP: Owners Roelof and Sheryl Prins love entertaining friends in the garden; tall weathered-steel containers flank the western entrance; *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude' and *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Little Honey' soften the edges of the garden; dwarf bamboo *Pleioblastus viridistriatus* brings a splash of gold and green to a shady spot.

Designer profile



The bulk of Lodewijk Baljon's professional work is in large-scale public and corporate landscape architecture. He maintains an office of 15 people in Amsterdam to service these commissions, which have included housing developments (notably a 5,000-dwelling project in Amsterdam in the 1990s), business parks and public plazas. Baljon has always combined academic study with professional work, earning a PhD and writing a book on parks, and lecturing at institutions such as Harvard University. His first big professional project was collaborating on the winning masterplan for the Parc de la Villette in Paris in the 1980s, when he was on the staff at the large Dutch firm of B+B. For further details go to www.baljon.nl (only in Dutch).



PLAN BY LODEWIJK BALJON

garden, which then turns abruptly to face the eastern strip of garden. From both path and terrace the move creates a surprise view of the garden's key moment: the canal.

Cool water

“I thought, let's have a big pond rather than a small lawn,” Lodewijk says of his decision to introduce a rectangular canal fed by two smaller, brown, weathered-steel troughs of different lengths. Water cascades gently over the rims of the troughs into the dark pool below. The water is pumped around continuously. These troughs are surrounded by box hedging, clipped precisely to the height of the canal, creating a supremely satisfying tableau and the unusual sensation of looking down on to box at close range.

The pool itself is edged with large-leaved subjects such as *Petasites japonicus*. The purple spires of umbrella plants (*Darmera peltata*) emerge from the water alongside *Iris laevigata*, the bullrush *Typha minima* and the white flowered *Sagittaria sagittifolia*. Water lilies also thrive here.

At the far end of the pool a multi-stemmed golden rain tree, *Koelreuteria paniculata*, creates a sculptural feature, backed by a *Cornus* 'Eddie's White Wonder' in the corner

and beech hedging as the boundary. The other end of the pool is shaded by another specimen plant, the Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*). The pool is a strikingly original intervention and sublimely beautiful in all weathers, from the intermittent rain and sunshine of my visit, with sparkling light modulating the many different greens, to the frequently duller Dutch days when the sound and sight of the water lifts the spirits.

This is a garden of straight lines and strict geometry, which nevertheless feels relaxing and intimate. Lodewijk explains: “In architecture, decoration is usually an add-on, but plants are a decorative element in their own right. The line of a concrete wall is different to that created by a green hedge. Plants give us the opportunity to work with that balance between the straight and the loose, the play between the lines you make and the way it grows and moves.”

This fruitful tension between geometry and planting has been exploited by designers again and again through the centuries, and here it works as well as ever. Lodewijk's plantings do not exactly soften the Modernist lines, rather they create an enriching and dynamic contrast. □

RIGHT, FROM TOP: *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert' flowers until autumn; the greenish flower heads of *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Grandiflora' whiten as they mature; Adirondack chairs on the terrace are perfect for relaxing; *Fuchsia* 'Foolke' and *Clematis vitalba* add bright sparks of colour to the mainly green scheme.

