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Using space-saving maneuvers, Tim Gledstone crafts a serene courtyard for his infill home.

# High Court

Inspired by traditional Moroccan townhomes, architect Tim Gledstone made the courtyard garden (right) the focal point for the overall design of his house in South London (opposite).



TEXT BY  
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PROJECT  
Wandsworth House  
ARCHITECT  
Tim Gledstone,  
[squireandpartners.com](http://squireandpartners.com)  
LOCATION  
London, England

When architect Tim Gledstone decided to build a home for himself and his family on a small, stray piece of land in South London, the idea of building the house around a courtyard garden became the key to his design. The narrow infill site—formerly a builder's yard and garage—was closed on three sides with the outlook limited to the facade facing the street. The courtyard that divides the single-story living spaces at the rear of the house from the three-story tower of bedrooms at the front became crucial for introducing light, air, and a sense of connection between indoor and outdoor space.

"The idea of having a courtyard was there from the beginning, and it was critical," says Gledstone, an architect with Squire and Partners, who designed and built his Wandsworth house as a solo project. "All of the windows apart from the frontage have to look onto our own land. Each room benefits from the courtyard, and it significantly enhances our appreciation of space and allows for an indoor-outdoor relationship, which is all the more important on a small site." >



“Each room benefits from the courtyard; it enhances our appreciation of the space and allows for an indoor-outdoor relationship.”  
—Tim Gledstone, architect and resident



The green roof (opposite) is covered with sedum to soften the architecture. According to Gledstone, it attracts a variety of wildlife to his urban location in addition to adding thermal mass.

Gledstone designed the slatted bench cum pool cover himself. The pair of white Chair Ones are by Konstantin Grcic, the Japanese black granite lantern is from Tokyo, and the reconstituted stone planters are from a local garden supply store (above).

The design of the courtyard house was influenced by a visit to Morocco, where *riads*—or traditional townhomes—are arranged around a central courtyard garden and are closed to the streets beyond. It was also shaped by the traditional courtyard homes of Japan, particularly the merchants' houses of Kyoto. Gledstone's wife, Patricia, is half-Japanese, and their travels to Japan have helped shape his approach to space-saving design.

“The Japanese are really masters of tight spaces,” Gledstone says. “There are brilliant examples of designing small spaces, and that’s how many Japanese people live. Beds get folded away, everything gets stored in cupboards, and rooms become multifunctional.”

The main open-plan living space at the back of the house—containing the kitchen, a sitting area, and the dining table—opens out onto the courtyard garden, as well as a modest light well planted with bamboo against the back wall of the building. Together with a slot skylight over the sitting room, these outdoor spaces—although modest in scale—introduce a significant amount of natural light. The courtyard also allows the eye to carry through into the garden, which becomes an outdoor room, while the same travertine

flooring is used for both outdoors and in, offering a seamless transition between them. Planters add greenery, and a triangular pool serves many functions, providing a reflecting pool and water feature, doubling as a plunge pool in summer.

The single-story section of the house is topped with a roof of green sedum, which helps soften the outline of the building when seen from the bedrooms, while adding another layer of natural greenery. “The wildlife love it,” says Gledstone. “A family of wagtails have moved in and feed on it, and we get lots of flowers and bees. For us, it looks great and gives us fantastic thermal mass and water attenuation. It helps create this sense of space and peace at the heart of Wandsworth.”

The house has been elegantly tailored to fit both the restricted site and the needs of the family, including the children, Kintaro and Aino. Other space-saving measures include fitted cupboards in the hallway and elsewhere, bespoke beds with integrated play spaces for the kids, and a square bathtub. It is quite a master class in creating a family home on the most difficult of sites, and the courtyard remains the most seductive element in its success. □