



In brief

What Garden designer's own garden.

A long, thin plot on the edge of town.

Where Southern Netherlands.

Points of interest Use of space, hedging and rare plants.

Size 350 square metres.

Soil Sandy loam.

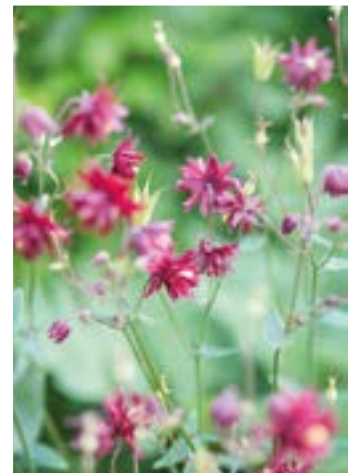
Climate Cool temperate, very similar to southern England.

Hardiness rating USDA 8b.

Narrow escape

Dutch garden designer Tom de Witte has loved plants from an early age, and he's indulged his passion in his own garden, cleverly structuring a long, narrow space into a peaceful retreat

WORDS NOËL KINGSBURY PHOTOGRAPHS MAAYKE DE RIDDER



THIS IMAGE Tom has played to the garden's strengths by planting against boundary walls and creating four distinct areas linked by a meandering path.

PLANT IMAGES (clockwise, from top left) The rich planting palette includes: *Geranium* 'Anne Thomson', *Baptisia australis*; *Aquilegia vulgaris* var. *stellata* 'Nora Barlow' and the climbing rose 'Guirlande d'Amour'.

RIGHT The bamboo *Chusquea culeou* 'Tenuis' flourishes in a shady spot near the house.



Tom de Witte has been a keen gardener since he was young. “I have been familiar with planting plans since I was 12,” he says. “A couple of months after I got my driving licence, I borrowed my mum’s car and drove to Hummelo to meet Piet Oudolf. It was a three-hour drive, so it was quite a journey for me.” A career in gardening seemed inevitable, and Tom now runs a well-established garden design business with fellow designer Corinne Lecluyse.

Tom’s own garden is in a small town in Zeeland, very near the Belgian border. It occupies a long, narrow strip, averaging about four metres wide – an awkward shape but one that allows for sub division and the creation of different zones, each of which has its own special atmosphere. “The garden has an *Alice in Wonderland* feel,” comments Maayke de Ridder, who photographed this feature, “because each segment is small but seems larger than it actually is.”

The area immediately outside the house has a small terrace that overlooks a lush

green planting with several young trees: *Acer griseum*, the rowan *Sorbus sargentiana* and silk tree *Albizia julibrissin*, all chosen because they are compact and provide year-round interest. As Tom explains, “The acer has wonderful bark, the sorbus has flowers and berries, and the albizia has a touch of the tropics.”

The planting style here is distinctly naturalistic, with several grasses and members of the cow parsley family, both of which strongly suggest natural habitats, even though they may not necessarily be north European natives. This natural approach is emphasised by the solid oak benches Tom has installed for seating.

The rear of the garden is not dissimilar, although it is more shaded. “There are trees growing in a cemetery behind,” says Tom, “so it is quite shaded, but having them enables me to ‘borrow’ some landscape.” Paving with relatively wide spacing filled with gravel creates a clearly defined central area. This part of the garden is reached ▷

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ABOVE The handsome umbel *Molopospermum peloponnesiacum* brings height and drama to this border.

PLANT IMAGES (above, clockwise from top left) The pretty pinks and purple tones of *Astrantia major* ‘Roma’, *Geranium x monacense*, *Allium schubertii* and *Salvia verticillata* ‘Purple Rain’ work well with the predominance of greens in the garden.



This oak bench offers the perfect spot to admire the paperbark maple, underplanted with the long-flowering *Geranium 'Anne Thompson'*.

Tom with his business partner Corinne Lecluyse who helped in the design of Tom's garden.



The end is reached through two contrasting zones, one dominated by beech hedging, the second by naturalistic grassy planting

▷ through two contrasting zones, one dominated by beech hedging and the second by naturalistic grassy planting. The hedged area is very different in character from the rest of the garden: ascetic, even severe, the rectangular green blocks preventing a sight line through.

"You go in, but you do not know what is at the other end, so you are invited to explore," says Tom. "This part is meant to be contemplative, a link between the flowery first part and the flowery next part of the garden – I like the idea of the *coulisse*." A *coulisse* is one of the flat pieces of scenery at the side of a stage in a theatre, or the gap between the scenery panels where actors can make entrances or exits. Drama builds expectation.

Narrow gardens will have a high ratio of boundary to area, so climbers are important. Some of the climbing plants here are what might be expected, such as the rose 'Guirlande d'Amour'; others are rather daring, such as *Ampelopsis*

megalophylla, which can be found clambering up a trellis. This rarely seen grape relative has huge divided leaves. Tom notes, "It will grow enormous but I prune it hard. I grow it because the foliage is so good and it has interesting fruit too."

Another rarity is the tree *Tetradium daniellii*, which can be found in the lower, shaded garden. It too has divided foliage and the additional virtue of flowering in August and September.

The demands of designing small gardens are very particular and can often be met by making this type of precise choice. Smaller plots deserve plantsman designers every bit as much as larger ones, as Tom's creation demonstrates. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

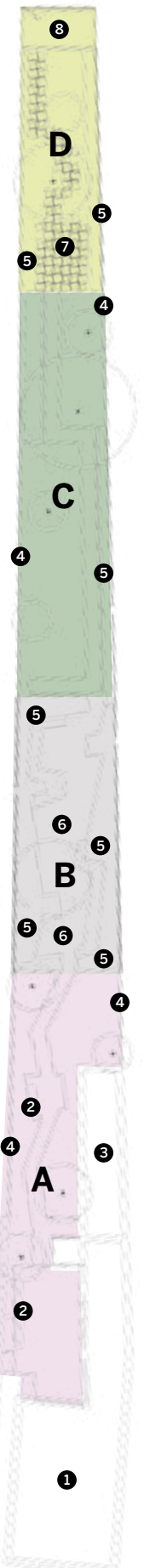
Tom de Witte Garden Design, Landstraat 18, 4527 CX Aardenburg, the Netherlands.

Tel +31 (0)1 730 1288.

Website tomdewitte.nl

Making the most of a long, narrow garden

- Develop areas with a distinctly different feel, so that each one has an atmosphere all of its own.
- Make sure the boundaries provide as much privacy as possible. This is often not possible for the entire garden, but can usually be achieved for one or two small areas. One of the best ways of doing this is to have a sheltering seated place, such as an arbour, at the very end; getting there becomes a journey, and this is often the easiest place to ensure privacy.
- Make the most of trees and large shrubs in neighbouring gardens to help blur the boundaries; planting in front of them can sometimes make it look as if they are part of your property.
- The surface area of the boundaries may be substantial, so use climbers on higher fences and walls to maximise the area that is planted.
- Tom advises, "Try to create a couple of extra little places to stop, such as somewhere to sit down. They will help you see the garden from different angles and give multiple viewpoints, which always make a garden look bigger."



GARDEN PLAN

- 1 House
- 2 Wooden bench
- 3 Shed
- 4 Wooden fence
- 5 Hedges
- 6 Slate
- 7 Stone paving
- 8 Compost



Near the house (area A), self-seeding aquilegias and woodland planting give a relaxed feel.



Clipped beech hedging (area B), obscures the end of the pathway tempting you to explore.



The slate path leads through a contrasting area of softer planting (area C).



The secluded far end of the garden (area D) features a bee-bee tree, *Tetradium daniellii*.