CASE STUDY
The Good Life

The garden of the Straw House on Stock Orchard Street in north London is just as surprising as the building. True to the ethos of this design project, the garden is no stick, landscaped space but an essential contribution to sustainable living in the city.

With an eye for the unusual and the ability to design low-impact, contemporary passive buildings, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects have made a name for themselves as sustainable architects. Sarah and her husband moved into the house in 2000. The garden backs onto a major railway line, not that this is apparent. Enclosed on all sides, it is overshadowed only at one end, and the rest of the space is open and sunny. Emma Driscoll was responsible for the design. Her brief was to create a garden that would provide food for the family and allow them to reconnect with the seasons.

1. The upper part of the garden is devoted to vegetable growing. Thought has been given to the varieties planted to ensure continuous cropping. Early season crops such as 'Oklahoma', 'Winter Spinach', 'Autumn crops' and 'Winter Tomatoes' all grow in abundance. The garden is also used as a meeting point for the community, with weekly workshops on offer.

2. Sustainability and innovation are key aspects of this project. The house is insulated with straw bales clad in galvanized steel. Water is harvested in water butts. The weathered tree trunk, which appears to be propping up the ceiling, is one of a number of found objects given a new role.

3. The lower garden has a rural feel, belaying its true location. Dividing it up into four sized beds, a seating area, and a decorative shady area, high hedges by two beech trees makes it appear much larger. Beds planted with roses and hydrangea, camellias, and azaleas give a sense of depth to the garden. There is a raised bed, where vegetables are grown in summer and flowers in winter.

4. The garden is divided into sections with a raised bed, a seating area, and a decorative shady area. High hedges by two beech trees make it appear much larger. Beds planted with roses and hydrangea, camellias, and azaleas give a sense of depth to the garden. There is a raised bed, where vegetables are grown in summer and flowers in winter. The garden is also used as a meeting point for the community, with weekly workshops on offer.

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