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Homes & Property

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The £6 billion relaunch of London Bridge

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Calming features: sculptural shrubs (left) surround a reflective pool and help to still the overactive mind

Soothing swirls: rhythmic pebble patterns (right) create a sense of harmony



Selfridges is pioneering the latest trend: the quiet room. Now create one in your garden

Your garden is a sanctuary

WITHIN the clamour of the city, what we crave are quiet, calm spaces. As part of its No Noise campaign, Selfridges has revived Harry Selfridge's innovative Silence Room of 1909, updating it to an insulated inner sanctum for shoppers seeking respite from the crowds. Converting a garden into a similar escape from distractions is surely the ultimate luxury in London living.

Throughout Selfridges, pods offering

Pattie Barron



guided meditations have been installed to still mind chatter; the quiet garden's equivalent would be a reflective pool or perhaps a diverting pebbled floor of swirling patterns. In summer, a freestanding hammock provides an impromptu temple for meditation or straightforward snoozing.

Green and white are the most soothing of colours and make a winning combination for shade. Sculptural shrubs and drifts of perennials make a more calming landscape than bitsy plantings. In a more colourful space, a curving arbour of green-leaved living willow can provide a calm corner; a lick of pale green paint and a curtain of evergreen jasmine turns a garden shed into a sanctuary.

"A hardscaped courtyard will be a lot noisier than a planted garden," points out Pat Fox, of Aralia Garden Design. "So fill your garden with plants, because both planting and water will help soak up noise. And if you're landscaping your garden, avoid slate and stone paving. Surfaces that absorb noise are grass, bark pathways and stone chippings."

How do you control the bustle beyond the garden gate? "White noise" is used by landscapers to block out the sound of traffic: a steadily trickling fountain is the most popular device, but pliable, fine-leaved plants such as bamboos, reeds and tall grasses supply plenty of rustle, swish and sway. Wind chimes are also effective, but avoid the clink of tin or clunk of bamboo, and invest in the glorious, precision-tuned silver alloy chimes of Gregorian chants, soprano or alto.



KIT FOR A QUIET GARDEN

- **Acoustic screens:** Jakoustic Noise Barrier System (0800 408 2234; jacksons-fencing.co.uk)
- **Gregorian alto and soprano wind chimes:** 01344 773096; thewindchimeshop.co.uk
- **Bird feeders and tables:** find a good selection at gardenbird.co.uk (0844 3220230)
- **Birdsong:** download BirdSongFM at iTunes
- **Water features:** find cascades and fountains at primrose.co.uk or call 0118 903 5210

Bird feeders – vital in winter – with a mezze of peanuts, fat balls and mixed seeds, will bring in the best kind of natural sound: birdsong.

To augment it, Fox suggests downloading birdsong on to a USB stick and uploading it on to an iPad or iPhone, or installing waterproof speakers.

However, if road noise is invasive, consider installing a double hedge – that is if you have the space. Fox says that for it to be effective, you need a depth of at least 1.2 metres. A skinny hedge will do little to deaden noise.

Alternatively, replace fencing with acoustic screens – heavy-duty timber panels that are used on motorways through built-up housing areas, and are claimed to knock back the road noise by about 30 per cent.

When Chelsea Physic Garden underwent significant replanting last year, acoustic screens were installed along the Embankment boundary and pronounced a success. "We used them where part of the garden was scarcely visited. Since we replanted that area, volunteers who address groups of visitors were anxious about being heard above the outside traffic," says curator Christopher Bailes. "Since we installed the screens, the volunteers say they're able to talk to groups in a natural way. The most substantial gain

Distraction: a bubbling fountain will hide noise from beyond the garden

is when you place the panels among planting. We painted ours the signature CPG black-green, and covered them with Virginia creeper, so they make a visual as well as sonic barrier."

Shelving the ear-bashing strimmer would be another smart move: after all, letting the grass grow longer and the wild flowers flourish is the message for 2013. So think of this as the year of the lazy lawn – and the lazy gardener too. Instead of mowing, you could be counting the daisies.



Gardening problems?

Email our RHS expert at: gardenproblems@standard.co.uk

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