

HIGH LIFE

Patricia Fox, founder of specialist landscape design practice Aralia, explains how a well-planned roof terrace can add significant value to property developments and help corporates boost their staff morale and productivity →



With outdoor space at a real premium in urban settings, the addition of a roof terrace can have a significant return on your capital investment. UK-based specialist landscape design practice Arala insists the past three years has seen a major uplift in such developments, both in London and internationally.

In the summer of 2012, for instance, property developer St George (Berkeley Homes Group) commissioned Arala to design a series of penthouse roof terraces for its prestigious development at Chelsea Creek, London. It was an open brief to design and deliver original roof terrace

“**ST GEORGE'S MARKETING TEAM ATTRIBUTED THE EARLY SALES TO THE 3D ARTWORK OF THE ROOF TERRACES**”

designs that included outdoor kitchens and fireplaces, automated pergola structures, water features, bespoke art, green walls and lush, abundant planting.

Despite the fact London was in the middle of a recession, with property fairly difficult to sell, the penthouse apartments were sold off-*plan* and ahead of schedule. St George's marketing team attributed this partly to the 3D artwork of the roof terraces. The first seven of the roof terraces are in development and due to be completed this spring (see visuals below).

Arala's approach to the design of roof terraces is holistic, with spatial design

playing a huge role in informing the design decisions. The options for roof terraces are very different to gardens on the ground. The palette of materials and plants has to be more robust, while the quality of light is different and can provide more drama. The boundaries also require a different approach, particularly because of the proximity to the sky, which offers a wonderful set of new design opportunities.

But the roof terrace isn't all about private space. Arala's Silver Flora RHS show garden at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2012 was conceived as an external green office for the future. Sponsored by RBS and set on a London roof terrace, it was named Rooftop Workplace of Tomorrow. The idea was to showcase a concept that hadn't been done before and to promote the benefits to a worldwide audience of a new way of employing unused roof space in urban areas. It was also to illustrate that more corporate companies should be considering offering greener outdoor space to their staff.

The benefits for employers are clear: huge appeal and attraction to the staff; better staff retention; more relaxed, happier staff; and better concentration and ability to focus (green environments are proven to do all this) the list goes on. "I want an office like this," was the popular feedback from most of the visitors to Rooftop Workplace of Tomorrow.

The Chelsea show garden included a dual-purpose central LED screen (approx 3m square). This large screen would enable small conferences and



presentations to be staged or it could be used to provide an ambience and a backdrop to transport the roof terrace user to another time and place, for example, a woodland walk with the sound of birdsong.

The roof terrace garden also included an array of opportunities for solo and team working. The innovative, hanging 'C' swings were perfect for individual relaxation; the cantilever bench under the Betula worked well for pairs of workers, perhaps needing to talk privately; and the table top tree desk with its eight bar stools under a central table top tree provided opportunities for both individual and group working. There was even a green herb wall our Heroic Tea Bar—which allowed roof terrace users to make a fresh cup of tea from herbs picked directly from the green wall. Finally, there was an external structure, with glass bi-folding doors, seamlessly designed into the roof garden, which allowed an indoor/outdoor space that was usable in all weathers. In short, the design of a roof terrace for corporates adds value for staff and the business.

Recently Arala has been approached to design an indoor/outdoor roof terrace



- 1 (Overleaf) Twenty-two roof terrace including metal arches with custom detail, 2m x 2m planing, and two glass pillars.
- 2 Large LED screen for small conferences, table top desk (top left corner), metal Tea bar
- 3 Large LED screen with automated canopy and bespoke eco-friendly furniture, designed especially for Chelsea/roof small conferences.



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in the Middle East. This will draw on its technical knowledge, with additional new research and innovation into interior gardens – an area Aralia predicts is set to grow significantly and be one of the

“ INTERIOR GARDENS IS A NEW TREND AND ONE FROM WHICH THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BENEFIT ”

next major worldwide trends. It's already happening in the UK, to a small extent, but with its specific climate challenges, the Middle East would undoubtedly benefit from interior gardens.

Back in the UK, Aralia has recently completed a roof terrace for a major luxury developer on a Knightsbridge property in London. It was a basement

roof terrace sandwiched between two multistorey residences, and was barely 100m overall. The palette was kept simple, providing unity across the design, and some beautiful 'wow' features, such as the step-over water feature, ensured the final garden looked stunning. Better still the apartment was sold, once again, in advance of schedule, which resulted in a shorter sales cycle, and increased profits. This roof garden has subsequently been awarded a Gold and Best Roof Terrace Design by the New Homes & Garden Awards 2014 (UK Express Newspapers).

There are many sound ecological and aesthetic reasons for introducing green roof gardens. At the moment, hard-landscaped rooftops dominate our city and urban areas. The introduction of greener options will provide wide-ranging benefits to cities and their inhabitants. Looking down onto grey concrete is vastly inferior to the experience of looking down onto, or even up towards, well-designed green spaces.

Roof terraces come in many shapes and sizes, and on many different levels, from basement to floor 70 and more. The opportunities are enormous and Aralia feels strongly that there is much more innovation that can be done to change the nature and fabric of our roof terraces. For further information, or to talk to Aralia about potential projects, please contact: www.aralia.org.uk
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ABOUT PATRICIA FOX

Patricia Fox has been a finalist in 2004. She is a registered member of the Society of Garden Designers and is a fully qualified HEDCO Aralia has a strong track record of successful residential and commercial projects in the UK and abroad and has worked on major plans for country estates of several acres.



- 4 Low level roof terrace with limestone paving, pebble rail edging, bespoke metal archway and lush green planting
- 5 Seventh floor roof terrace including automated aluminium louvered pergola, outdoor firebrace, green wall and Eco plastic planters
- 6 Seventh floor terrace with handwood decking, underlit glass panels, outdoor firebrace and kitchen with automated canopy



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