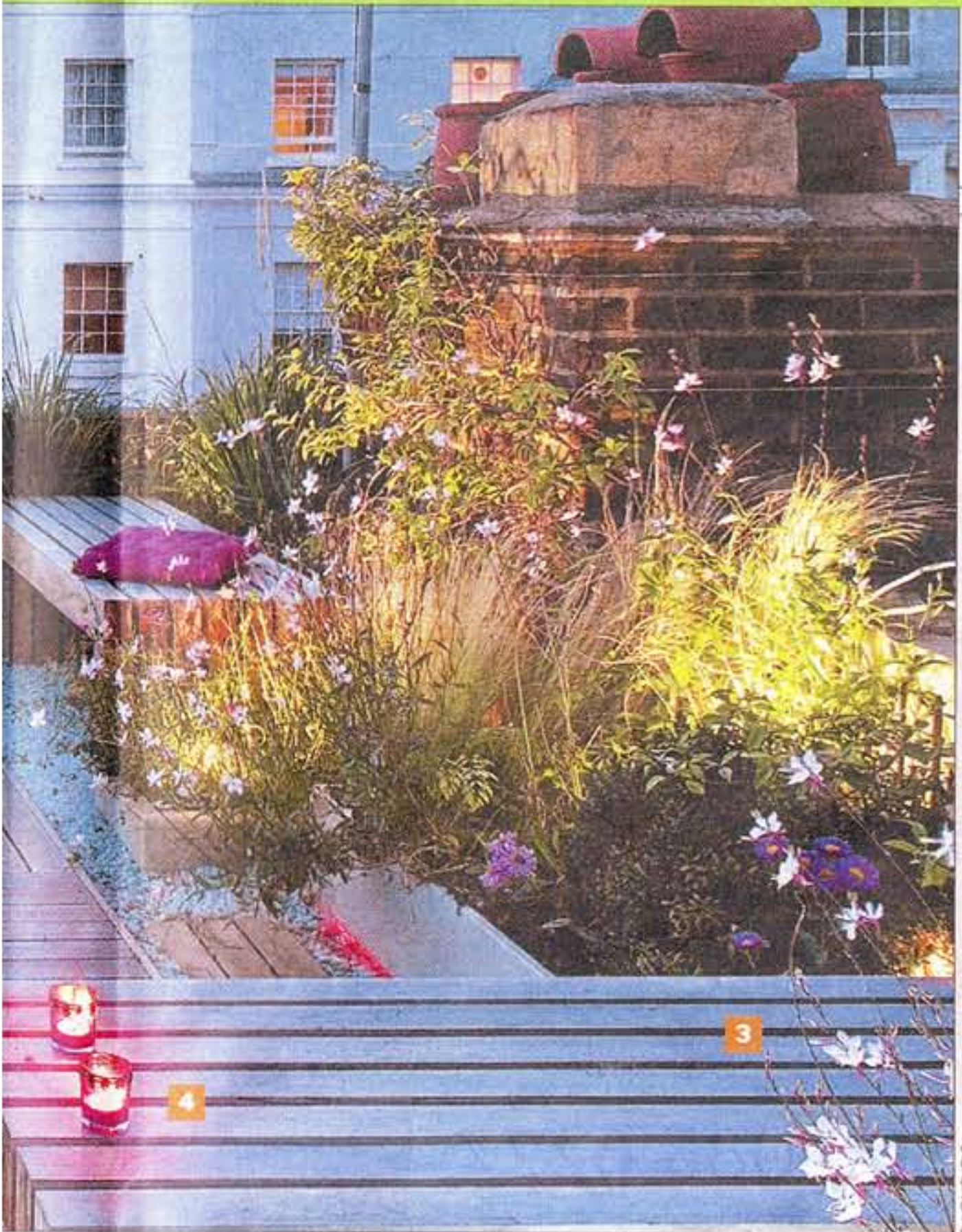


ELSPETH THOMPSON'S GARDEN CHOICE



THIS WEEK:
CITY-CENTRE
ROOF TERRACE

On a balmy evening in the city, there is no better place to be than up on the roof, where the air is fresher and one can watch the urban landscape light up below. The large roof terrace was one of the attractions for the young couple who bought this west London house, and they commissioned Charlotte Rowe to turn the nondescript space into a spectacular outdoor entertaining area. Both working long hours, they were keen to use the space late into the evenings, and Rowe responded with a scheme in which lighting (1) was a key feature. Having ascertained the roof's load-bearing capacity was adequate, she installed pale ipe decking, and low benches made from western red cedar that were wide enough to work as tables or sun loungers. Frosted glass panels lit from below were set into the deck, and the spaces between the wood filled in with frosted glass chippings, while lengths of pink rope light created a romantic rosy glow. Spike spots and uplighters were also placed among the planting – principally wispy grasses (2) and feathery gaura (3) that swish and sway in the slightest breeze and light up like fibre optics after dark. Pink cushions and night lights (4) provided the finishing touch.
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GET THE LOOK

1 LIGHTING

Charlotte Rowe worked with lighting specialist Rebecca Weir of Light IQ (0208 749 1900; www.lightiq.com) on this project to ensure that all the elements were orchestrated successfully. The pink rope lights are a quirky contemporary touch, and Festive Lights (01257 792111; www.festive-lights.com) can supply LED rope lights (90 per cent more energy efficient than standard rope lights) in a variety of colours, including pink, cut to length, from £31.96 for 4m.

2 GRASSES

The Mexican feather grass, *Stipa tenuissima*, is the star of the show, with its filament-fine inflorescences illuminated by the uplighters at night. Drought and wind-tolerant, it is great for roof terraces and containers. Other grasses used include pink-tinged *Calamagrostis brachytricha* and vertical *C. x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' to create a diaphanous screen. One of the best nurseries for grasses is Marchants Hardy Plants near Lewes in Sussex (01323



811737; www.marchantshardyplants.co.uk) which has all of the above, plus an abundance of real rarities, and a gorgeous display garden in which to see them grown at their best. No mail order, but well worth a trip, with Great Dixter, Charleston and other gardens within reach. Check out their new website for details.

3 GAURA LINDHEIMERI

Gaura is one of those delightful fresh and airy plants that can enliven any tired or staid border – and now is the ideal time to plant it in sunny, well-drained soil. 'Whirling Butterflies' is one of the prettiest varieties, and Crocus (0844 557 2233; www.crocus.co.uk) has it in two-litre pots for £5.99. Crocus is offering *Sunday Telegraph* readers three plants for £15 – order by phone or online by typing the word Whirling into the Crocus website search box.

4 NIGHT LIGHTS

Candles and tea lights blowing out in the wind is an all-too-frequent occurrence in gardens, and particularly on windy roof tops. Cox and Cox (0870 442 4787; www.coxandcox.co.uk) offers a clever solution in the form of electric tea lights, £16 for 12 (integral batteries give approximately 36 hours lighting). Placing them in jam jars lined with pastel pink tissue paper gives an atmospheric glow.

