



**THIS WEEK:**  
THE  
OUTDOOR  
ROOM

As summer slips into autumn, what better way to make the most of any impromptu warm evenings than to start an outdoor fire and extend your alfresco entertaining long after dark. The built-in open fireplace (1) makes a real focal point in this contemporary outdoor room. Created by garden designer Charlotte Rowe at her own home, the fire was an experiment that she has since copied for clients. It was constructed in concrete blocks that were then rendered and coated with coloured limewash (2), and is flanked by raised planters and seating made from the same materials. In small urban gardens, design features have to work hard, and so the retaining walls for the raised beds double up as seating. A wooden bench at right angles is also great for lounging or, with a dining table, could seat three to four. Planting has been kept simple to avoid encroaching on the limited space.

Three pleached pears (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer') line the high brick wall at the rear, while other key plants include an espaliered fig, ornamental grasses (3) and evergreens (4). This combination of strong structure and architectural planting means the garden has year-round appeal. A subtle lighting system (5) highlights the main features. Even in the dead of winter, the clean, calm lines are a visual pleasure. And just imagine the fire lit in the snow for a midwinter party. *Charlotte Rowe Garden Design, 020 7602 0660, www.charlotterowe.com.*



MARIANNE MAIERUS

## GET THE LOOK

### 1 FIREPLACE

This custom-built model is for an open log fire – worth the mess and inconvenience for the glorious warm glow and crackle. It is advisable to work with landscapers and a chimney flue supplier such as Topstak (01446 771567, [www.topstakchimneys.co.uk](http://www.topstakchimneys.co.uk)) to ensure the fireplace is safe. For a cheaper, off-the-peg model which could be incorporated into a solid surround, Buschbeck's masonry barbecue fireplaces (which can be converted to gas) cost £399 from Inspired Fires (0845 0090916,



[www.inspiredfires.co.uk](http://www.inspiredfires.co.uk)).

### 2 LIMEWASH

Using exterior limewash gives the render a lovely irregular patina over time. Giacomo's "Cement" from Francesca's Paints (020 7228 7694, [www.francescaspaint.com](http://www.francescaspaint.com)) costs from £14.50 a litre. Remember: no rain should fall on the limewash for five days after application.

### 3 GRASSES

The striking 2m-high feather-reed grass *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' forms a see-through screen between the house and garden. It appears early, and lasts well into winter. The Big Grass Company (01363 866146, [www.big-grass.com](http://www.big-grass.com)) sells it in one-litre pots for £5.

### 4 EVERGREENS

Neat mounds of *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum' fill the raised beds. A compact, low-maintenance evergreen, it looks good all year round. Above it, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* is climbing up the trellis.

### 5 LIGHTING

With an open fireplace, subtle electric lighting is required, and Rebecca Weir of Light IQ (020 8749 1900, [www.lightiq.com](http://www.lightiq.com)) helped create this simple yet atmospheric scheme. Outdoor rope lights (£35 for 10m from Lighting Direct, 0844 8044 944, [www.lighting-direct.co.uk](http://www.lighting-direct.co.uk)) are placed beneath benches, behind the fencing and along the top of the fireplace, while a pair of 82cm high Brompton lanterns (£125 each from Heal's, [www.heals.co.uk](http://www.heals.co.uk)) flank the fire.