

Somewhere in all gardens there is a wall, be it a screen wall, a retaining wall, a boundary wall or perhaps just the walls of a water feature or raised planter. Walls are part of the structure or skeleton of the garden, and how they look is an integral part of the grounds, and as such deserve careful consideration in order to complement the whole area.

IT'S EASIER WHEN DESIGNING THE GARDEN FROM SCRATCH and one is considering the style along with the architecture in a more cohesive way. Usually the garden walls would echo the house in some way, often with similar lines and materials. It requires more thought when adding in wall features later, when similar materials may no longer be available or desirable. Do not add the latest fad or idea without making sure it's going to complement what already exists. Walls are likely to be there for a long time.

LOW-MAINTENANCE MATERIALS AND FINISHES MAKE A LOT OF SENSE. After all, garden walls are likely to get grubbier quicker than house walls, so plaster and paint is often rather more onerous to keep in shape than stone, metal or concrete, which actually looks better when old and weathered. Ideally, one should also consider the provenance of the materials in terms of environmental issues – local is lekker, and you can feel really angelic if you manage to use recycled material such as wood, second-hand bricks or rubble. It's also good for the budget.

ALONG THESE LINES, GABIONS ARE THE MOST FLEXIBLE SOLUTION, not needing foundations per se, and being able to be filled with whatever is at hand towards the centre, with a good-looking facing such as pebbles or slate towards the outside. They can be made of many grades of mesh – from diamond to more uniform metal grids. I have even managed to wash topsoil down into them between the stones and one can get a certain amount of growth along the top.

SOMETHING ELSE TO CONSIDER IS WEATHERED STEEL. It's reasonably expensive but long-lasting and has the advantage of being narrow and therefore not taking up too much space on restricted sites, while having the strength and durability required for retaining permanent earth. Great for a modern or rustic look.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP A MODERN STEEL-AND-ROCK GABION IS JUXTAPOSED WITH A WOODEN SCREEN WALL; A NATURAL STONE WALL COVERED IN TICKY CREEPER SERVES AS A RETAINING STRUCTURE IN A MULTI-TERRACED WALL, WHILE THE STEEL SLATS ADD A MODERN EDGE; HERE, A TEXTURED-ROCK SCREEN WALL, WATER FEATURE AND SCULPTURE MERGE TO FORM A STRIKING FOCAL POINT AT DELAIRE GRAFF WINE ESTATE

Divide and Conquer

Modern gabions, weathered steel and natural rock – landscape designer Franchesca Watson raises the bar with garden walls that are both visually appealing and functional

