TDAG Case Study

Podium planting

A successful podium garden in the City of London

London, UK

Project name:
Seething Lane Garden

Completion date:
2017

Team:
City of London
(Client)

Capita Symonds
(Landscape architects)

DeepRoot
(Cellular construction)

City & Guilds of London Art School (Artwork)
Details of the carvings

Trees & Design Action Group

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Overview
Seething Lane Garden is adjacent to the former Port of London Authority (PLA) Building on Trinity Square. It is on the site of the Navy Office where Samuel Pepys the diarist, worked. In 2017, after years of project planning and construction, the garden reopened to the public and the PLA building repurposed as a Four Seasons Hotel.

The Project
The land ownership was complicated as the land below the garden belonged to the building owners, but the garden above was on a 999-year lease to the City of London. This meant that a permanent garden had to be built over the new basement structures required by the hotel project – a challenge for all!

Creating the podium structure
One of the primary goals of the garden's redevelopment plan was to ensure the new trees would grow to healthy maturity. The landscape architects worked with DeepRoot to design a structural system to provide a beneficial, long-term rooting environment with adequate soil volume standards for robust growth. The cells also support the suspended pavement paths above while allowing nutrient-rich, uncompacted soil to be incorporated within its void space. Indeed, the layout of the plaza allowed the cells under the hardscape to connect the areas beneath the softscapes to one another, creating a large, united soil environment for active root expansion. The cell system also buttresses the small walls around the planter areas, providing even more space for loamy soil.

As described above, the unique challenge of this project was the garden's foundation: an underground car park was built beneath Seething Lane Garden. This meant that the garden itself would have to be constructed from the bottom up, as opposed to the top down. A minimum 2 metre depth for the garden had been agreed to provide the necessary drainage and suitably layered rooting environment. So, to reach walking level, project planners chose a 4x cell configuration – a more affordable option than laying down space-filling foam as the garden's foundation. The DeepRoot technical team assisted project designers throughout the process. Technical director Pat Greeley was on location for the cell installation, ensuring the process went smoothly.

The cells also provide a destination for area rainwater. Water from the roof of the hotel building is collected and filtered down beneath the garden where it enters the soil in the cells and irrigates the 18 new garden trees.

The newly improved Seething Lane Garden is already a local favorite, a small green oasis in the middle of the city. The Pepys bust has been reinstated on a new plinth and his life commemorated in carvings on the paths. Graeme Smith, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee, raved about the project and its benefits: "*Seething Lane Garden is a good example of our work protecting and conserving historic green spaces in the city. The addition of new trees and shrubs will improve the biodiversity of the area [and it] will become an important habitat for wildlife within the urban landscape.*"

Eight years on, in 2025, the landscape is fulfilling both the client's and the designers' expectations.

Cover image: Looking towards the woodland from the lawn, a green oasis in this dense urban setting.
Image: © DeepRoot

Approach along Seething Lane from the south inviting visitors to spend time with nature.
Image: © DeepRoot

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The walkway between the hotel and the garden maintains an important pedestrian link without intruding into the garden.
Image: © DeepRoot

Installing DeepRoot's Silva Cells gives trees optimal conditions for urban tree growth in a well-drained environment – creating the garden from the bottom up.
Image: © DeepRoot