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A TOUCH OF GLASS



The conservatory is fast becoming the favourite room in the house. Its versatility throughout the year brings light to winter breakfast times, exotic surroundings to dinner parties and the beauty of a view that makes summer lunches irresistible or relaxing in the sitting room rather special. Shirley Anderson soaks up four very different atmospheres



URBANE JUNGLE

Designer Derek Frost's conservatory is well on the way to being a mini-jungle: 'I didn't want the standard English conservatory. I like to imagine I'm in Florida.' He designed it with architects Jestico and Whiles and building started seven years ago. A greenhouse on one side of the conservatory is where the serious horticultural work is done; on the other side glass doors open on to a courtyard and Japanese garden. To increase the sense of space the end wall is a mirror with mirrored foil covering its D-shaped top section. The steel sculpture built in the ceiling space is being used to establish a plant world high up, not only to fill the space visually in this very tall building but also to imitate a jungle environment. Thermostatically controlled electric venetian blinds help to create a tropical atmosphere for Derek's orchids, cacti, bromeliads and palms using an environmental control system made by Tomtech which comprises two plumbed in humidifiers, electric fans, ventilation and watering systems all monitored by a computer which balances temperature, humidity and sunlight. 'To grow orchids we need a low temperature at night but heat, shade and high humidity in the day.' ▷

Derek Frost's steel and glass conservatory in London: his extensive collection of tropical plants includes a fishtail palm, tall cacti, and a passion flower which crosses the room at ceiling height. The plant bed, right, is one of three and houses a large variety of plants which include banana palm, dracaena, bromeliads, abutilon and different palms. The glass vase holds cut orchids. An illusion of extra space is given by the end wall mirror. The chairs are bamboo, designed by Linda Garland who lives and works in Bali, and a split bamboo rug, also from Bali, covers the Bavarian natural stone floor



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