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ظہر و صبح (۱۰۰) ۱۰۰

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Roof Gardens

I have lived in London all of my life, firstly in Greenwich and later on in the suburbs to the south. The areas are all very green, with street trees and plentiful parks and open spaces. In earlier years it was quite rare for any of us to go into central London, but it did happen occasionally, if we were treated to a day out or a theatre show. Just going up on the train was a novelty. Then I had the experience of the "big city" with its large old buildings, full of history and grand self-importance. Every street had a luxury hotel, institution, embassy or government building looming up over us, or large shops with top of the range expensive goods. My main impression though was of its greyness, other than adverts and shop windows. Everywhere there were big buildings of stone in all shades of grey, and the humbler buildings and railway structures of dirtied London yellow brick, now black. There were a few trees here and there, mostly plane trees that can withstand the pollution.

Nowadays I go into London regularly to see its sights. The most revealing trip I made was my first visit to the Sky Garden, a large 35th floor open space given over to abundant plants and trees, and several cafés. It is not strictly a roof garden as there is a glass ceiling, although on the viewing balcony one can stand out in the open. My first visit was a hot sunny day in summer, with a clear sky and far-reaching views all over London. I was mainly struck by how green London is. The white and grey mass of buildings is profusely dotted with

green, with larger areas of green for the parks. London is not full of skyscrapers so the view out is expansive, and one can see right to the horizon without much interruption. It all gets greener towards the suburbs, although I should say bluer, to be more accurate, as green becomes a greyish greeny-blue in the distance.

There is another roof garden in The Barbican, also in central London, a pyramid-shaped conservatory that was built to make use of the roof area and to hide the tall theatre tower in the centre. It is full of tropical plants, tall palms and other trees, and abundant greenery, all helpfully with their names displayed. There is a pond in the middle with koi, and in another corner a large shallow clear pond with small goldfish, a delightful place to sit and watch them swimming around.

Last year we discovered another roof garden at the top of the Crossrail Building in east London. We had seen it many times en route to elsewhere, noticeable because of its unusual shape, but we had no idea there was a garden inside. The very lowest floor, deep underground, contains the railway station itself, and the other floors have restaurants and other facilities. The top floor is covered with a curving roof of triangular sections of glazing, but as there are lots of open sections, I think it just about counts as a roof garden. When we were there, it had rained during the night and there were large wet patches, and a few birds flying in and out.

Roof Gardens

Yesterday we visited a new roof garden that only opened this year, and at last this truly is a roof garden, entirely open to the elements. It is called The Garden At 120 and is the 15th floor of a large building in Fenchurch Street. The stark angular framework of the pergola is new, clean, bare steel. All the bases of the struts have wisteria plants tied in, ready to grow up and cover it. These climbers can grow quite fast, with long new shoots breaking out everywhere, and so I am sure that the framework will be covered very quickly, especially as in this artificial soil environment, there will be no lack of nutrients. When it is covered in branches and leaves, the pergola will provide shade but not much shelter if it rains. Sometimes being under a tree can be worse, as the drips all congregate in certain areas, ready to go down one's neck, and even continuing to drip after the rain has stopped. But for a worker in a stuffy heated office, the luxury of getting wet in the open air and smelling the damp soil and plants might be a rather welcome break.

Although to the north side there are several tall buildings, to the south one can see the Thames, Tower Bridge and views off into the distance. When we were there it was very warm and sunny, but the horizon was quite hazy, as the sun was drying off the misty February

morning, which actually started with frost on the cars and house tops. Looking down on the nearest roofs is not an attractive sight, although it was interesting to see all the little railways that house the window cleaning machines. I found it much more enjoyable to admire the garden itself, the plants, the little watercourse, and the views off into the distance through the glass screens round the perimeter. As usual, there are security staff wandering around so you know decorum will be maintained at all times.

We discovered one last treat when we exited the lift into a covered foyer-cum-alley. The entire ceiling was covered in a large LED screen showing waving tree branches and leaves, and blue sky beyond. After a while I realised that it was not a live scene being relayed from elsewhere, when I remembered that our trees are not yet in leaf. What a lovely way to enliven what is a quite dark area, and it could easily be missed by anyone hurrying out with their gaze ahead or down. This roof garden is a good place to escape the crowded feel of the street level scene and its traffic noise, and have just sky above and around one. I am really looking forward to visiting it again when the plants have grown more. (1015 wds)
