

Renovation special

URBAN SOLUTION

SEA LEVELS

A plain two-storey outdoor area is transformed into an inviting, multi-functional outdoor retreat.

TEXT JESSICA SANFORD | PHOTOGRAPHY JASON BUSCH

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

While this garden, in Sydney's eastern suburbs, has a sensational south-facing view over Tamarama Beach, the owners felt they weren't taking advantage of the outlook. They cited a lack of privacy, little sun protection and no seating as reasons for spending so little time outside. They wanted a simple, low-maintenance space with outdoor cooking facilities that was easy to clean. As they have a young daughter, they also required a safe play area and, because they're frequent travellers, the garden needed to be self-sufficient enough to be left for long periods. Under Matt Cantwell's direction, the structural components of the space remained the same (a top balcony with stairs leading down to the garden area). However, an outdoor kitchen – including a barbecue, fridge and cupboards – was added to the balcony. On the lower level (pictured right), tiles were removed and 'lawn' was added for green relief.



MATT CANTWELL
DIRECTOR, SECRET GARDENS OF SYDNEY

"This area lacked design flair and had no garden element. We didn't change the structure; instead, we got the finishes right, kept them consistent, introduced plants and changed

the furniture. Now there's a variety of ways to sit in the garden – beanbags, the swing chair and built-in seats. Every part of the garden comes into its own at different times of the day."

STEP TO IT

The stairs were painted the same colour as the balcony and garden surrounds to maintain consistency throughout the two-level space. Because salt air is corrosive, the balustrades are marine-grade steel posts and wire.

HANG LOOSE

Matt introduced a swing chair from Space (and a large blackboard against the opposite wall) to bring some fun to the child's play area and to encourage time outdoors.

LIGHT TOUCH

The garage is beneath the garden, so Matt had to consider how much weight it could support. The lightweight planter boxes, from Quatro Design, are made from fibreglass and reinforced concrete and topped with white arctic pebbles from Eco Concepts.

TOUCH OF GREEN

SmartGrass was the best option here as there wasn't enough depth to add soil for natural grass. No mowing or maintenance is required. "We put a layer of rubber underneath the synthetic lawn, which gave it a lot more spring," says Matt.

LOW MAINTENANCE

The vitrified tiles, from Onsite Tiles, are produced from a low-maintenance ceramic. Easy to clean, they are perfect for buildings close to the sea; after a wash-down to remove salt residue they dry quickly and aren't easily marked.

LOVE SEAT

A timber bench in dappled shade draws people downstairs and into the garden. The low-maintenance tallowood timber isn't stained, so only requires oiling to bring out the colour.



STAYING POWER

Drought-tolerant plants hardy enough to withstand the coastal location were vital to this scheme. The majority are succulents, although Matt also added frangipani, which thrives by the sea, and bird of paradise. "Succulents are such a low-care plant and they add texture to any garden, but there is a whole swag of plants to choose from that are great by the coast," he says. The garden was designed so that once the plants were in place, they wouldn't need a lot of attention. For the colour scheme, Matt kept to neutral tones, then encouraged the owners to introduce colour with cushions and vases. On the balcony, a retractable shade from Outrigger Awnings answers the need for shelter and privacy. It allows the owners the option of winding back the shade on the days that the sun isn't too strong or retracting it at night to enjoy the stars.

TROPICAL OASIS

Yucca elephantipes are spiky plants. Matt trimmed the leaves from the stems to achieve a palm tree-like effect, allowing people to sit on the bench in comfort.



SWITCHED ON

"The lighting is extensive," says Matt. "Downlighting provides safe passage [through the garden], while uplighting highlights the features, and the two combine to provide playful shadowing effects."

BALMY BOUGHS

To lend the garden a tropical feel, a frangipani tree was planted in the corner planter box. Like the other plants, it is easy to take care of as it doesn't require a lot of water.

SMALL SUCCULENTS

The different sizes and types of plants gives this garden texture and colour. Chalk sticks (*Senecio serpens*) surround the frangipani and *Crassula* was planted at the base of the *Yucca elephantipes*.

- 1 Frangipani underplanted with chalk sticks (*Senecio serpens*)
- 2 *Yucca elephantipes* underplanted with *Crassula*
- 3 Bird of paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*)
- 4 Outdoor kitchen
- 5 *Sansevieria*
- 6 *Agave attenuata*
- 7 Stairs



THE LITTLE TOUCHES

A The beanbags, cushions and beach towel, all from Citta Design, add colour to the garden.
B *Yucca elephantipes* are planted on the balcony's boundary to enhance privacy. littala carafe and glasses from Design Mode International. Lantern from Koda Lighting.
C *Sansevieria* was planted in a trough behind the outdoor kitchen bench because it is a waxy plant that can withstand the heat of the barbecue.
D The outdoor kitchen has a built-in stainless-steel barbecue. White bowl from Freedom. Blue bowls, candles and tea towel, all Citta Design.

MATT'S TIPS FOR COASTAL GARDENS

- * **Good materials** Salt build-up from the sea means furnishings can get sticky and grimy, so choose low-maintenance materials, such as plastic, that are easy to wash down.
- * **Suitable plants** Choose plants that are able to withstand coastal conditions.
- * **Understand the site** Study the area to ascertain where the wind comes from, then plant to create shelter. Position outdoor seating to take advantage of the view. **H&G**

CONTACT

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