

URBAN SOLUTION

# A BIT ON THE SIDE

A suburban home on a tricky block was given extra dimension by unlocking the potential of an under-utilised side passage.

TEXT ELISABETH KNOWLES | PHOTOGRAPHY JASON BUSCH

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

This property, on Sydney's lower North Shore, faced a common dilemma for homes situated on a corner block – with two street frontages and little by way of a backyard, where do you entertain? The large lawn area at the front of the house abuts a busy main road, and while the existing *Murraya* hedge boundary afforded the family visual privacy, it did little to dampen traffic noise. Thus, this part of the garden was ruled out as a barbecue area. At the rear of the house, the driveway and garage occupied all usable space. Both areas were also disconnected from the living areas of the house. So, what to do? Landscape designer Matt Cantwell saw the potential in the property's extra-wide 3.5 metre side passage, and transformed it into a formal thoroughfare cum private courtyard, complete with built-in barbecue (see page 134). It is now an ideal spot to sit and read the paper or to entertain on a grander scale.



**MATT CANTWELL**  
DIRECTOR,  
SECRET GARDENS  
OF SYDNEY

"The owners wanted somewhere they could cook and entertain outside, but the only usable space was in an awkward position at the side

of the house. By using the principle that outdoor living areas should be adjacent to indoor living and kitchen areas, we set about creating a formal path that could also present as a courtyard."

BLOCK PLANTING

A mass-planted garden bed was installed alongside the path, adding lush, layered interest on the walk to the courtyard. Sophisticated, white-flowering plants were chosen, including a clipped hedge of star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), clematis and clustered arum lilies (*Zantedeschia* hybrids).

HEDGE OF REASON

Matt decided to extend the existing orange jessamine hedge (*Murraya paniculata*) around the perimeters of the property. "This is a very reliable hedge and not hard to maintain at a decent height," says Matt. "As a boundary wall, it is visually impenetrable all year round, and at 1.9 metres it allows premium privacy."

UP THE GARDEN PATH

Rectangular Himalayan sandstone pavers form stepping stones. By setting pavers into the Sir Walter Buffalo turf at intervals, a visual link is created between the lawn area and courtyard. "It's not an essential feature, but it helps graduate the construction from hard paved areas into the soft lawn spaces," says Matt. >





**HOLDING COURT**

A Mediterranean mood was achieved in the courtyard with a Positano table and forged iron chairs by Yardware, as well as the formal placement of Bradford pear trees (*Pyrus calleryana*). The classic look was given a practical Australian application by including a stone-capped bench seat. "When you're tight on space, built-in furniture is the way to go," says Matt. "A freestanding setting requires room to move around chairs on all sides, while a bench enables clear passage. This one extends past the length of the table to allow casual seating. People can sit and chat to the barbecue chef." Timber slats on the wall are angled for the comfort of diners, with the added benefit that it is warmer to lean against than masonry.

**STAR PERFORMANCE**

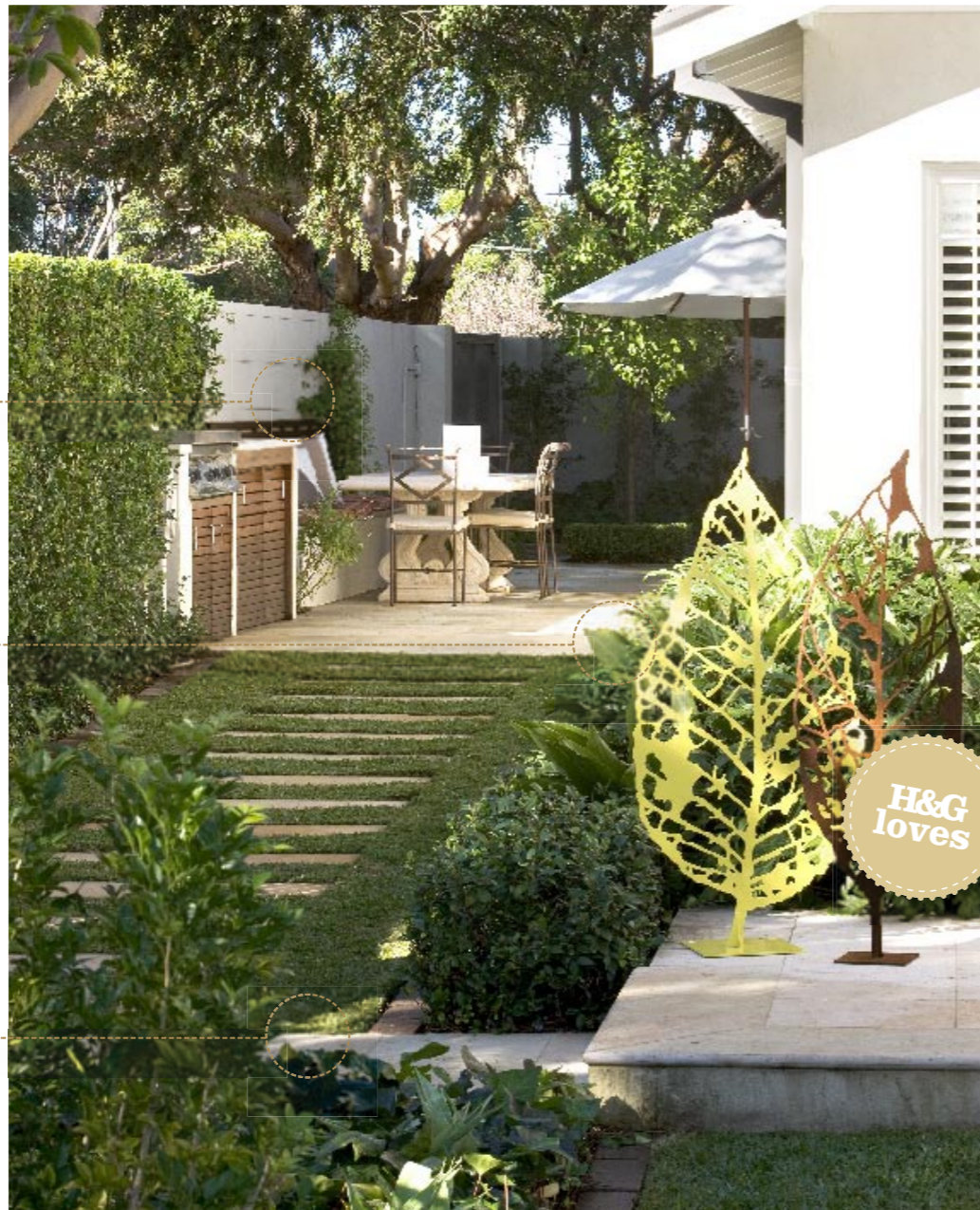
Star jasmine is trained along the boundary wall to the courtyard. This reflects its use as a low clipped hedge on the opposite side of the path, as well as continuing the living wall theme begun by the Murraya hedge along the perimeters at the front of the property.

**OUTDOOR ART**

Statement pieces add interest to the home's front landing. Contemporary leaf sculptures by Adam Jones, available from Garden Life.

**FINE LINES**

A dog-legged kink in the stepping-stone path delineates different zones in the garden. On the left of the photograph, the path leads to the courtyard, while a parallel path runs from the elevated entry porch towards a recreational lawn area at the front of the home.



A



B



C



D

**ALL IN THE DETAIL**

A Himalayan sandstone is less porous than Sydney sandstone, doesn't turn grey as it ages, and offers a more uniform finish. "It's also 60 per cent of the cost," says Matt. B and C *Philodendron xanadu* and *Aspidistra elatior* give contrasting textures to glossy, dense green foliage. D Cushions covered in Collioure Rouge outdoor fabric from Ici et Là lend a contemporary touch. Star jasmine climbs the rendered wall painted in Dulux Candle Bark.

**MATT'S GARDEN TIPS**

- \* **Easy access** Place the pedestrian entrance to a corner block on the quieter side street. No one likes standing on a busy road waiting to be let in.
- \* **Maintain continuity** Ensure outdoor decor matches the style of any adjacent interiors. It's not appropriate to have a contemporary courtyard with modern furniture next to a traditional, formal sitting room because when you're in one area you will be able to see the other, and the looks will clash.
- \* **Don't over-prune** If you cut back a hedge too often, you'll be looking at half-cut leaves and it won't flower. Let it grow until it's a bit fluffy, then cut back deeply to promote new growth. **H&G**

Illustration by Allison Langton. For Where to Buy, see page 204.

- 1 Garage
- 2 Laundry-drying area
- 3 House
- 4 Large palm tree
- 5 Murraya hedge
- 6 Street frontage
- 7 Entry porch
- 8 Block-planted garden beds
- 9 Sandstone path
- 10 Courtyard dining and barbecue area
- 11 Bradford pear trees
- 12 Driveway



**CONTACT**

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