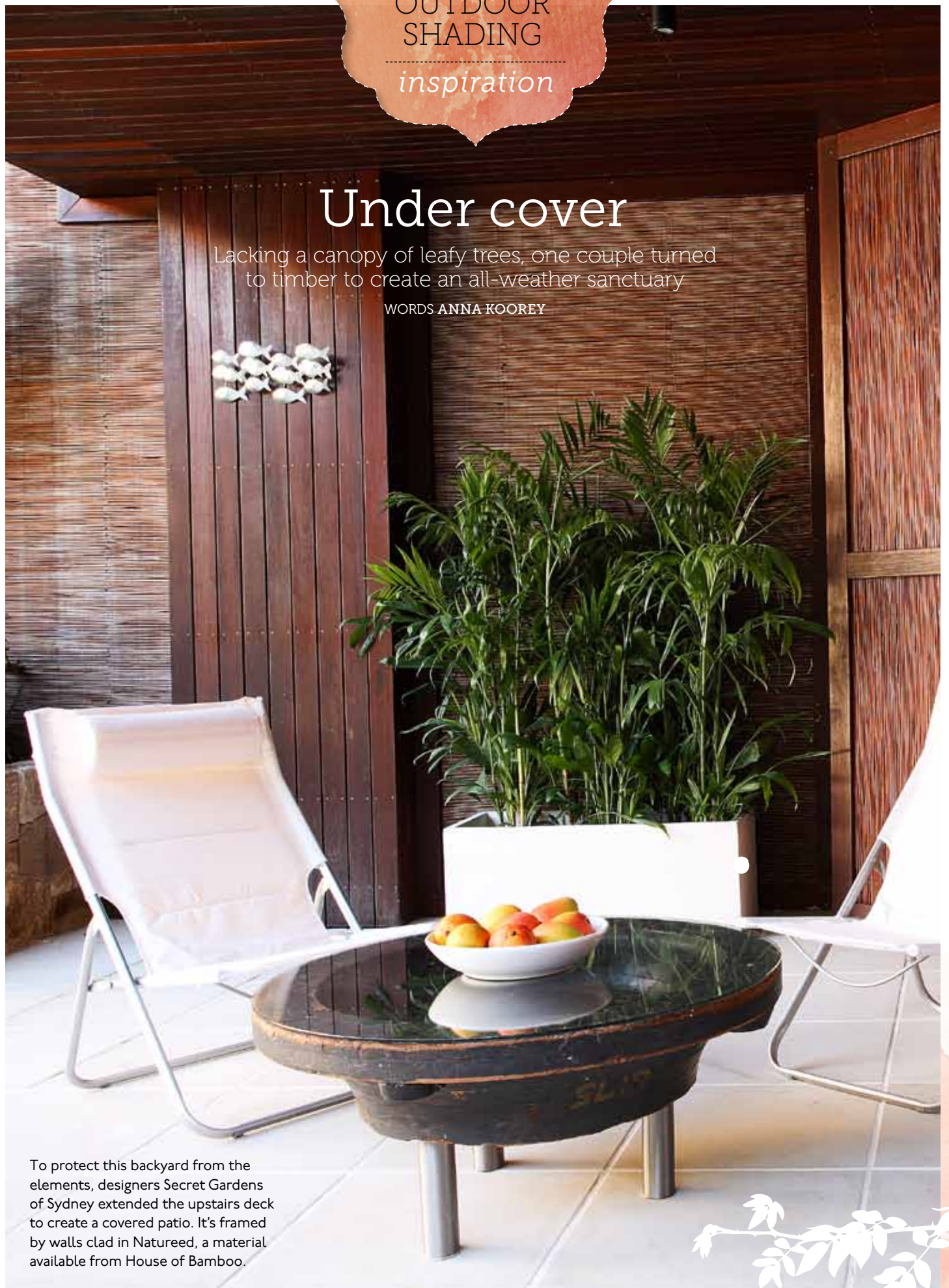


OUTDOOR  
SHADING  
*inspiration*

## Under cover

Lacking a canopy of leafy trees, one couple turned to timber to create an all-weather sanctuary

WORDS ANNA KOOREY



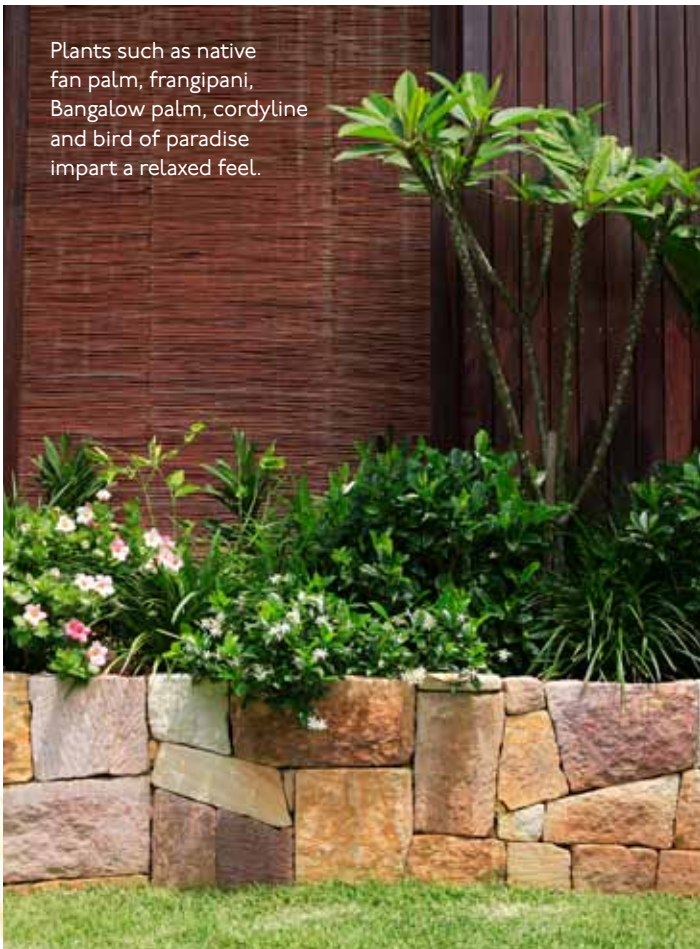
To protect this backyard from the elements, designers Secret Gardens of Sydney extended the upstairs deck to create a covered patio. It's framed by walls clad in Natureed, a material available from House of Bamboo.



**Made in the shade**  
 "We waterproofed the upstairs deck so the patio underneath stays dry," says designer Matthew Cantwell. Panels of hardwood decking on the surrounding walls continue the timber theme, while laid-back lounge chairs (for similar, try Freedom's 'Deckhaus' chairs) and a coffee table made by Matthew complete the outdoor room.



**Set in stone**  
 Large-format 'Cashmere' concrete pavers from Eco Outdoor cover the patio floor and wrap around the pool, while dry-packed Sydney sandstone creates an organic-look retaining wall. A Kartell 'Prince Aha' stool from Space and a contoured lounger (for similar, try the Paola Lenti 'Wave' chaise from De De Ce) add a resort feel.



Plants such as native fan palm, frangipani, Bangalow palm, cordyline and bird of paradise impart a relaxed feel.

**LOOKING OUT ONTO THE** lush tropical paradise that is Anna and Andy's Sydney backyard, you'd never guess it was once a character-less concrete space without a streak of green to be seen. The outdoor area was taken up by an enormous pool, surrounded by five-metre-high walls. "You'd look down from the deck and all you could see were these ugly white municipal tiles on the pool, walls and floor," recalls Secret Gardens of Sydney managing director Matthew Cantwell. Anna and Andy gave Matthew the task of transforming the site into an inviting outdoor sanctuary with areas of sun and shade. "There was nothing green down there when we bought the property; and the pool was double the size," Anna says. "We wanted to create a space with both a swimming pool and a green area for our two children to play on, while giving the space a tropical feel that reflects our home's position near the beach."

To keep costs down, Matthew and his team built the new pool inside the old and covered the surrounding walls in Natureed, a natural, durable, reed-based cladding, avoiding the time-consuming and costly job of ripping away the wall tiles. It was important to Anna and Andy to have shaded sitting areas since the garden is exposed to westerly sun, so Matt extended the deck from the house to create an undercover patio. "It's a great spot to sit while the kids are in the pool, and we love to entertain there," says Anna.

Chic white planters filled with Mexican bamboo palms bring the garden into the outdoor room and give it the vibe of an eco resort. "We chose Mexican bamboo palms because they enjoy dark conditions and grow to ceiling height," explains Matt.

The sun influenced the planting decisions throughout the garden. Canopy plants, such as native fan palm, Bangalow palm and frangipanis, provide shelter for groundcover and flowering plants. >



**Light the way**  
The garden is designed to be enjoyed at night, too. Lights in the garden bed cast flame-like patterns up the fence, and the pool is illuminated under the surface of the water. Matt installed downlights in the ceiling of the patio for after-dark entertaining, while lights in the stairs guide guests safely.

Deep green foliage and a sparkling blue pool bring this *secret garden* to vivid life



< Matt chose tropicals in keeping with the garden's theme, planted in raised garden beds along the borders to frame the space in green. "We wanted a garden that didn't require much watering so we planted young tropicals and watered them less, so as they grew they acclimatised," says Anna. An irrigation system keeps them thriving.

Now that the stark white tiles have given way to a verdant paradise of glossy green leaves and vibrant blooms set off against a sparkling blue pool, the family spends most of their time here. The high fences, decorated with a mass of fragrant star jasmine, provide complete privacy. "I love that it really is a secret garden – it's sunken and secluded," says Anna.

*Secret Gardens of Sydney, (02) 9314 5333, [secretgardens.com.au](http://secretgardens.com.au).*

## CUBBYHOUSES

## Little worlds

Furnish a cubbyhouse with a fertile young imagination and children can become anything they want to be, writes Elizabeth Wilson.



Text by Elizabeth Wilson. Photography by Chris Warnes (this page), Nick Watt (opposite). Styling by Jessica Hanson (this page). For Where to Buy, see page 190.



Children love to create little worlds of their own. They'll make one using a blanket draped over the furniture – and suddenly they're princesses in a castle. Or they'll find it inside the hollow of a tree, where they are forest elves protecting the world from evil. And, if they're really fortunate, they might just find themselves the proud owners of a cubbyhouse.

The beauty of a cubbyhouse or a tree house is that they are dedicated spaces for child's play; an escape from the world of adults. When children enter their miniature home, they become doctors, school teachers, chefs, mermaids sipping on tea and pirates sailing the high seas. There's a magic about cubbyhouses for every child – and every child within.

### Huff and puff

In the *Three Little Pigs*, the house made of sticks suffers a sad fate, but that's not the case with this little place (opposite). Made from tea-tree saplings, it was created by Spirit Level Designs as part of a landscaping scheme for the garden of a home in Sydney's Surry Hills. This sturdy hut is a hideaway for Jack, six, and his sister Ava, five. "We didn't want anything too cutesy. We wanted to keep it simple but fun," says their mother, Cathy Walton. "We wanted it made from natural materials as an antidote to all the plastic out there." Designer Hugh Main says he was inspired by the thought of "a romantic *Gulliver's Travels*-style hut".

Spirit Level Designs, Redfern, NSW; (02) 8399 0660 or [www.spiritlevel.com.au](http://www.spiritlevel.com.au).

### Home sweet home

Sitting in a Sydney garden, this cubby (above) is straight out of a picture book. "I wanted a cubby that looked like a little house," says Berry, who bought the Homestead model, from Custom Outdoor Creations on the NSW Central Coast, for children Isabella, seven, Rose, five, and Louis, 19 months. "I wanted to create a place where the girls would love spending time," she says. The house has its own place in the garden, and its own garden, landscaped by Secret Gardens of Sydney. Berry is happy that the passionfruit and *Stephanotis* are making themselves at home here. "It makes it look even more like a miniature house." >

Custom Outdoor Creations, Kincumber, NSW; 0415 282 297 or [www.customcubbies.com.au](http://www.customcubbies.com.au).



Photography by Claire Takacs (this page), Mark Roper (opposite). For Where to Buy, see page 190.

**DIY CASTLES**

For those handy with tools, there are plenty of flat-packed cubbies available: **Australian Cubby Houses by Cubbykraft** offers about 50 styles of cubbyhouses. Prices range from about \$1500-\$3500; [www.cubbykraft.com](http://www.cubbykraft.com). **Cullens Cubbies & Forts** cubbies start from the petite construction-ply 'Cinderella', \$725, and go up to the western red cedar 'Queen Bee', \$4225, which has slides, a double swing and a fireman's pole; [www.cullenscubbies.com.au](http://www.cullenscubbies.com.au). Other makers of DIY flat-packed cubbies, include: **Aaron's Outdoor Creations**; [www.aaronsoutdoor.com.au](http://www.aaronsoutdoor.com.au), **Quality Cubby Houses**; [www.cubbyhouse.com.au](http://www.cubbyhouse.com.au), and **My Cubby**; [www.mycubby.com.au](http://www.mycubby.com.au).



**< Family retreat**

When Tessa and Stella Yu visit their grandparents in Pechey's Bay, Tasmania, they have a cubbyhouse (above) waiting for them. "It has given them so much fun over the years," says their grandmother, Robynne Huckerby. Cooking and playing house have been popular in the past, and "when the cousins come, it's disco time and they use torches in there at night and do crazy dancing." Now that Tessa and Stella (far right, with friends Saffy and Zara) are getting a older (seven and nine respectively) they use it in different ways. "They go down there with their i-whatevers and set up an internet cafe," says Robynne. And when they aren't visiting, the resident labrador, Ripley, has first dibs. "The girls won't want to hear this, but he sleeps in there when there's a storm."

**Natural high**

Sitting high in the branches, above the realm of mortals (and adults), a tree house is the ultimate cubby. When the Cooper family of Melbourne bought their weekender in Romsey, this tree house (opposite) came with it, much to the delight of Max, eight, and Zara, six (right). Perched in an old gum tree, and six metres up and away from the house, the tree house represents wild adventure for the independent-minded (and sure-footed). "I'm keen on them being independent in their play. I love them being outdoors, exploring and making their own fun," says their mother, Sophie. And with sheep looking on from the neighbouring paddock, the children feel connected to nature too. >

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**BUILDING DREAMS**

A cubbyhouse should be strong, well-made and designed with functionality in mind but first and foremost it has to be a play house, says designer Adam Jones from Spirit Level Designs. "They don't need to be extravagant, but children do like windows, doors, tunnels or ladders." And a cubby needs to be large enough for adults to enter, "so they can sit with the child or be shown around".



Photography by Angelita Bonetti (this page), Maree Homer (opposite). For Where to Buy, see page 190.



**< Secret worlds**

"They're like nymphs playing in the forest," says Angela Antelme of her two daughters Albertine, six, and Gardenia, five, as they play in their subtropical garden and cubby (above), set within a five-acre property on the outskirts of Brisbane. Designed by Angela and husband Philippe, it's made from weatherboard with a Zinalume roof by Philippe, a landscaper who creates custom-made cubbies using recycled materials. The design was inspired by the arched window, which the couple salvaged from a skip bin. "We wanted something sympathetic to our house and made it big enough so that when they get older they can use it as a studio or even another bedroom," says Angela.

**Philippe Antelme, Brisbane, Queensland; 0417 775 760.**

**Cubby love**

When the Kaplanian family of Perth bought their home a few years ago, the pre-existing cubbyhouse (opposite) hadn't been in use and "needed a lot of love," says June Kaplanian. Her daughters Iman, eight, and Isabella, six, (right) have been happy to oblige. "They play shops and serve food through the window. And when their friends come over, they colour in and hang their artworks and treasures up," says June. The cubbyhouse, a timber structure with a Colourbond roof, is tucked into the side of the garden, with a large gum tree hanging over it. Inside, the Ikea furniture is complemented with ever-changing artworks with abstract-expressionist leanings. **H&G**

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