



OUT

crazy for you
Creating a bluestone path though this garden was genius

Matthew Cantwell from Secret Gardens designed this lovely green courtyard in Sydney's Coogee. It's a small space, so the sense of journey was a clever device to make it appear bigger. Lining the crazy-paved bluestone path is *Olea europaea*, *Dioon spinulosum*, *Viola odorata* and *Arthropodium cirratum*, plus many other featured plants that stand proud of the Dulux Domino-painted boundary walls. **Turn the page for more details.**

Round planters from Hibernated
Outdoors bring greenery to
the spotted-gum deck. Potted
plants include *Philodendron*
bipinnatifidum, rubber plant
(*Ficus elastica* 'Burgundy')
and *Peperomia scandens*
'Variegata'. Beyond that are
olive trees (at left) and
Japanese maple (at right), with
tractor seat plant (*Ligularia*
reniformis) and *Hymenocallis*
littoralis at ground level.

DOUBLE

A small garden in Sydney's eastern suburbs
celebrates its clever dual personality

LIFE

WORDS LAURA BARRY PHOTOGRAPHY NICHOLAS WATT



This garden leads something of a double life. Located at the southern end of Coogee Beach in Sydney's eastern suburbs, the front has a chic coastal-desert vibe. But at the rear of the property, shade is abundant and the owners, Graham and Tanya Pindar, like to enjoy respite from the harsh summer sun there, surrounded by lush green layers of foliage.

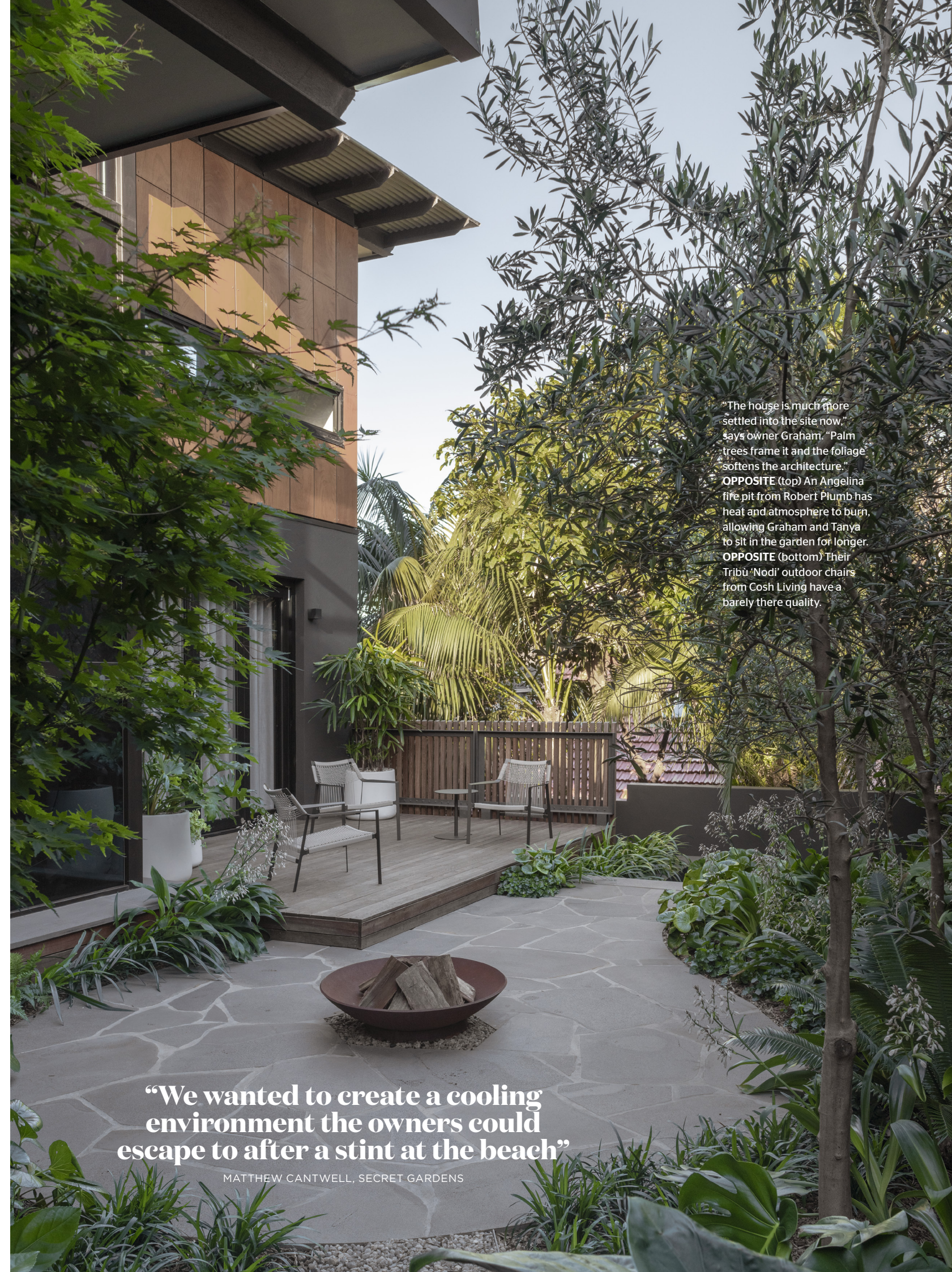
To create their two special places, the Pindars hired Sydney landscaping firm Secret Gardens in 2018 as part of a major property upgrade. As well as updating their front garden and balcony, the couple wanted to utilise the proposed deck at the back, designed by architect/interior designer Natalie Sciberras, and have a fire pit just off to the side of it.

Secret Gardens, helmed by managing director Matthew Cantwell, relished the challenge of transforming both outdoor spaces. The design team approached the brief in two ways, treating the front and back areas as separate yet seamlessly cohesive parts of a whole. "When we saw the front garden for the first time during the build, it was hot and exposed," says Matt. "Our main priority was selecting plants that would flourish in that spot. The rear garden had a completely different atmosphere. It benefitted from advanced trees and plants in the neighbouring yards, and was already a lovely space in summer."

The design for the front garden utilises relaxed materials and chunky sandstone stepping stones on the casual yet clear paths. For the plantings, Matt chose kentia palms (*Howea forsteriana*) and species such as variegated Caribbean agave (*Agave angustifolia* 'Marginata') and the cactus-like candelabra tree (*Euphorbia ingens*), which all enjoy hot and windy conditions.

"Coogee is very hilly and sandy," says Matt, whose biggest challenge was improving the soil quality. "At the front we needed really tough plants and wanted their structure to highlight just how challenging the conditions are. Some of the plants are meant to be a little confronting visually, and tough enough to withstand anything. In the rear garden, we wanted to create a cooling environment the owners could escape to after a stint at the beach."

At the back, Matt celebrated the spotted-gum timber decking by framing it with large, round, white planters. These bring the greenery up towards the house and into the outdoor seating zone. He placed the fire pit, a design by Robert Plumb, on a lower area paved with grey bluestone flagging, which ties into the overall colour scheme of the house and extends the alfresco entertaining space further into the garden.



"The house is much more settled into the site now," says owner Graham. "Palm trees frame it and the foliage softens the architecture." **OPPOSITE (top)** An Angelina fire pit from Robert Plumb has heat and atmosphere to burn, allowing Graham and Tanya to sit in the garden for longer. **OPPOSITE (bottom)** Their Tribù 'Nod' outdoor chairs from Cosh Living have a barely there quality.

"We wanted to create a cooling environment the owners could escape to after a stint at the beach"

MATTHEW CANTWELL, SECRET GARDENS



Against the side of the house are a number of new Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) trees, while olive specimens (*Olea europaea*) sit along the boundary where there is plenty of sun. A blueberry ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) hedge has also been planted in this location to help screen the house and its occupants from neighbouring residents and passersby.

“The maples are still immature and we’re waiting for those to grow, to connect and form more of a wall of foliage for privacy,” Graham explains. “But what has taken off is the Boston ivy on the back wall, which provides so much greenery in that area.”

Now that it’s all planted in, the garden is a great match for the renovated home. It looks young and trendy at the front, then progresses into a more low-key and timeless green space at the rear, where Graham and Tanya love relaxing on the deck with their books in summer and nestling around the fire pit in winter.

“We also love sitting at the front, looking at our garden and the ocean beyond,” says Graham. “We have seating that we move from the balcony to the deck, because when we entertain we find that people tend to fragment into different areas; some like the sun on the deck, others like the shade. But now that the backyard is just two main levels and runs the width of the house, we have much more usable space.”

Both hot and dry, cool and lush, this small urban garden represents the two sides of the coin that is the Australian landscape – and each is a great success. “We don’t always aim for this kind of duality,” says Matt. “But it worked beautifully here.” ¹⁰
Secret Gardens, Botany, NSW; secretgardens.com.au

PLANT LIFE

Think crowd-concealing foliage with great structure and a robust nature

1 Native grass (*Lomandra tanika*). **2** Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). **3** Candelabra tree (*Euphorbia ingens*) **4** Paper plant (*Fatsia japonica*). **5** Variegated Caribbean agave (*Agave angustifolia* ‘Marginata’).



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE
 Graham and Tanya are having fun with their new two-in-one garden. They can look out to sea from the balcony at the front – surrounded by agaves, palms and other dry-climate plants – or retire to the quiet calm of their green-fringed deck at the back of the house.