

THE LOCAL PROJECT



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Architecture and Design of Australia and New Zealand

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A MEMORABLE WATERFRONT GARDEN

COVE HOUSE BY SECRET GARDENS

Words by Jackson Hides • Photography by Nicholas Watt • Landscape by Secret Gardens

With a brief that encouraged bold design and thinking outside the square, Secret Gardens was afforded the opportunity to develop the landscaping and gardens for an iconic home overlooking Sydney’s Port Hacking.

The house, designed in 1969 by Reuben Lane, was completed in 1973 under the same free-spirited brief the current inhabitants gave to Secret Gardens. The result sees one of Sydney’s finest homes now accompanied by a suitably provocative garden. Upon arriving at the property, the street presentation includes a mix of cacti and round concrete stepping-stones, which immediately set the tone and complement the period of the house. A large koi pond, which access to the front door bridges over, and a courtyard on the northern side of the house with built-in barbecue and curved seat further capture attention on arrival to create what Secret Gardens founder Matt Cantwell calls “a moment of realisation that this garden is showcasing something entirely original.”

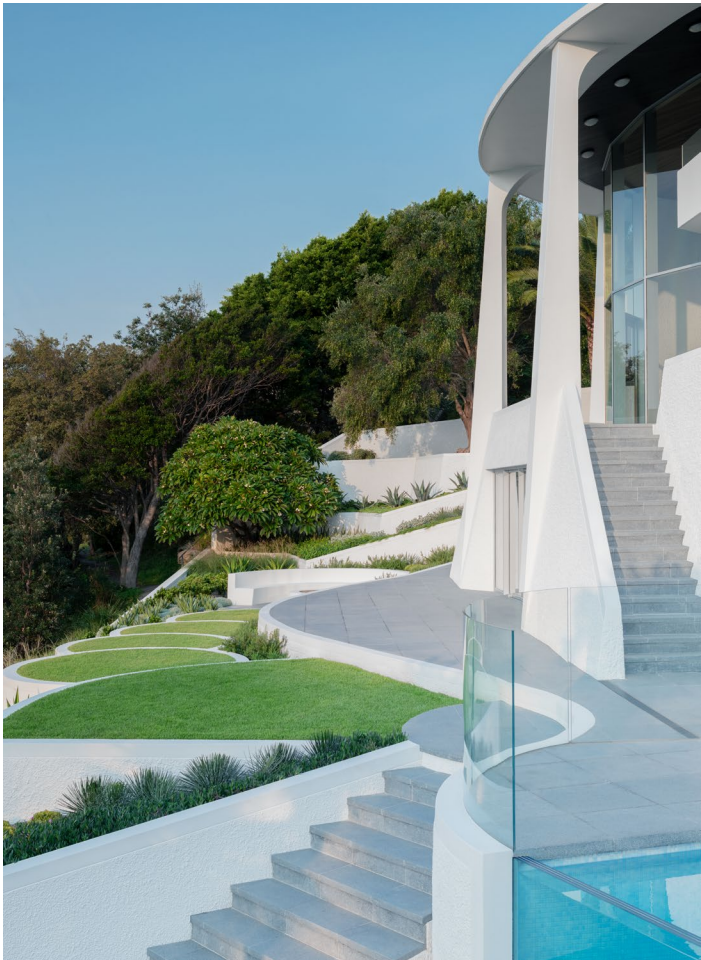
Matt tells how the brief for Cove House came about shortly after he and his family had been holidaying nearby. After trying in vain to get across on his paddle board and inspect the house from the water, he soon after received a call from a client. As Matt tells it, “he explained where his house was, that it was a prominent house with some architectural significance. I asked him if it happened to be a large white house with interesting curves, and, well, the rest is history.”

It is indeed now the water side of the property where the garden and landscaping are most arresting. As the level drops away towards the water and the building seems to emerge from the ground, the landscaping and gardening is suddenly drawn into sharp focus. The swimming

pool features a glass end that overlooks the water, whilst the lawn is divided upon large circular stepping-stones adjoining a circular firepit area. The organic shapes speak to the cohesion with the front yard as you reach the rear of the property.

Initial plans and images of the model constructed by the architect had revealed a proposed pool and landscaped gardens that had never been realised. Unfortunately, these were impractical for the current client’s requirements, with the clients hoping to avoid a garden dominated by pool fencing – something which was not factored into the original designs at all. The decision was made, therefore, to design a back garden that was not detached from the home as the existing garden was. The lap pool is partly tucked under the house, which Matt explains achieved “the best outcome for the garden. The building was the inspiration for the shapes found throughout. We used a combination of curves and angled lines found both on the façade of the house, as well as internally.”

With a host of considerations – from the brutal weather conditions that can whip off the water to the need for an organic design language to complement one of Sydney’s most celebrated homes, it is clear that Secret Gardens has excelled in making Cove House an even more celebrated destination. With an unwavering attention to detail and dutiful respect to the existing design, there now exists a complex and rewarding solution to an imaginative, yet nevertheless challenging, brief.





As you move to the rear of the property, large circular grass landings adjoin a circular fire pit.