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INSPIRING HOMES WITH HEART

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An incredible outlook was
marred by glare and noise, but
smart landscape design gives
this garden its five-star tag

point of view



WORDS NIGEL BARLETT STYLING JANE FROSH & LUCY TWEED PHOTOGRAPHY NICHOLAS WATT

OUT gardens

Landscape designer Matt Cantwell added sound-absorbing properties to this courtyard wall, and planted it out to create an eye-catching feature. "Up the top of the green wall, we chose plants that are more sun tolerant, whereas the ones down the bottom are more protected. We put thirstier plants lower because any watering makes its way down, so they stay hydrated for longer," he says.

BLUE CUSHIONS, SALLY CAMPBELL, SALLYCAMPBELL.COM.AU, PURPLE PILLOWCASE, THE SOCIETY INC., THE SOCIETY INC.COM.AU



Dreaming of a home with views over Sydney Harbour? There's one thing you'll need to take into account: when the property faces due west, your garden will be almost impossible to sit in during the heat of the late-afternoon sun.

This was the problem facing the owners of a house in Rose Bay. Built in 2009, it has picture-perfect views of the Harbour Bridge that they couldn't make the most of on a summer's afternoon. So Matt Cantwell and his team at Secret Gardens (secretgardens.com.au) stepped in to create an outdoor area that would provide the owners with the shelter they needed. "They have a spectacular place, but at times it's just too hot and bright to sit at the water's edge and take in the harbour," says Matt.

There was already a courtyard that the owners could retreat to, but they wanted more peace and quiet - protection from the noise of neighbouring properties, nearby construction and boats, ferries and so on. "All the noise was echoing between the building lines," says Matt.

The solution was to renovate the courtyard, adding shade and sound absorption, and create design features for relaxing and entertaining. The most prominent of these is an entertaining alcove. Matt and landscape designer Robert Finnie worked with an acoustic engineer, who came up with a targeted approach. "Most people think a 1.8-metre wall would reduce noise but it does very little, and a tall hedge won't keep out noise either," says Matt. Instead, he had the alcove wall built to a height of 3.8 metres, and clad it with soundproofing panels of perforated cement sheeting lined with a sponge-like polyester insulation. This reduces noise from the other side and absorbs sound bouncing from the harbour and elsewhere.

The alcove features a built-in barbecue, with a raised planter above so the bedrooms have a green outlook. The barbecue rangehood passes up through the planter, while an electric awning extends out from beneath. The awning offers shade from the belting summer sun and retains heat in winter. A coffee table in front of built-in seating has a dual purpose: lift off the lid and it's a firepit - "great for marshmallows!" says Matt. Both the barbecue benchtops and the coffee table/firepit are made from brushed Basaltina stone which, along with the bluestone paving, complement the architecture of the house.

With that practical issue dealt with, Matt turned his attention to the greening of the adjacent wall. "The owners wanted to give it a dramatic look. It's essentially a living artwork," says Matt. "Whenever I design any garden, whether it's on the wall or the ground, I treat flowers as a bonus rather than the main event. I think more about foliage contrasts through variation in shape, size, colour and texture." The exception is Brazilian walking iris, *Neomarica gracilis*, which is long and grass-like with white-and-purple flowers. "It's quite spectacular and very exotic looking," says Matt. Aside from that, there are blue chalk sticks, *Senecio serpens*, along the top of the wall - one of the stand-out plants according to Matt. Among others, *Zoysia tenuifolia* or Korean velvet grass, *Westringia fruticosa* and *Philodendron 'Xanadu'* with its interesting leaf shape.

Integral to the wall is a mirrored water feature, which creates a fascinating play of light. "You get a lovely sparkle as the sun is going down," says Matt. "With most other water-wall surfaces, such as copper or stainless steel, you can barely see the water moving. With a mirror, the water looks like it's going down and up as well - it's quite bizarre."

With such an inviting courtyard, it may be tempting never to venture far, but the waterfront has its own charms. By the harbour, an infinity pool is the perfect spot for catching some rays. It's fair to say, as far as outdoor spaces are concerned, the owners have a place in the sun.

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MATT CANTWELL, DIRECTOR, SECRET GARDENS

A raised platform ensures that the harbour views can be enjoyed from the prime spot of a deck chair. Sitting beside the swimming pool, this space relies on simple greenery to let the water views take centre stage.

SUN LOUNGER AND TABLE, COSH LIVING.COM.AU
CUSHION, SALLY CAMPBELL, SALLYCAMPBELL.COM.AU



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1/ Manicured pittosporum 'Miss Muffet' complements the closely cropped lawn. The large white planter is a crisp addition to the more structured section of the garden by the pool.

2/ Softer and more relaxed foliage from the tropical *Alpinia nutans* beckons guests upwards to the courtyard area. The stairs are bordered with a garden bed, which defines this passageway.

3/ Theatrical spears of the native *Doryanthes palmeri* make a feature of the white wall. This hardy species is well suited to windy climates due to the strength of the pointed leaves - fantastic for coastal gardens.

4/ An undercover barbecue area gains its roof from a garden bed, so the overlooking bedrooms benefit from a green view. This alcove is well protected from all the elements, including the noise of the harbour, as Matt soundproofed the wall.



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