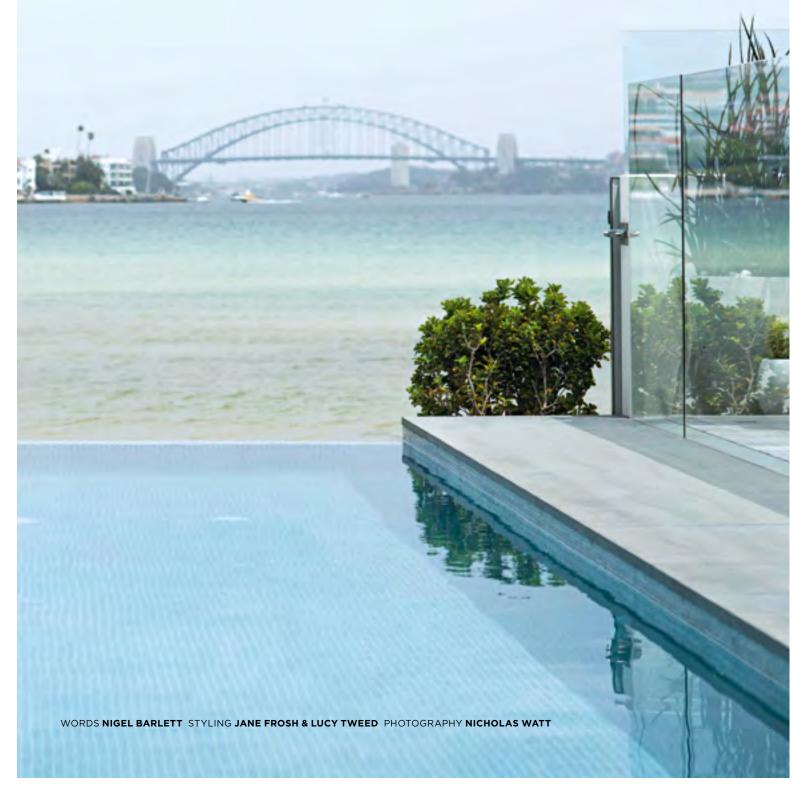
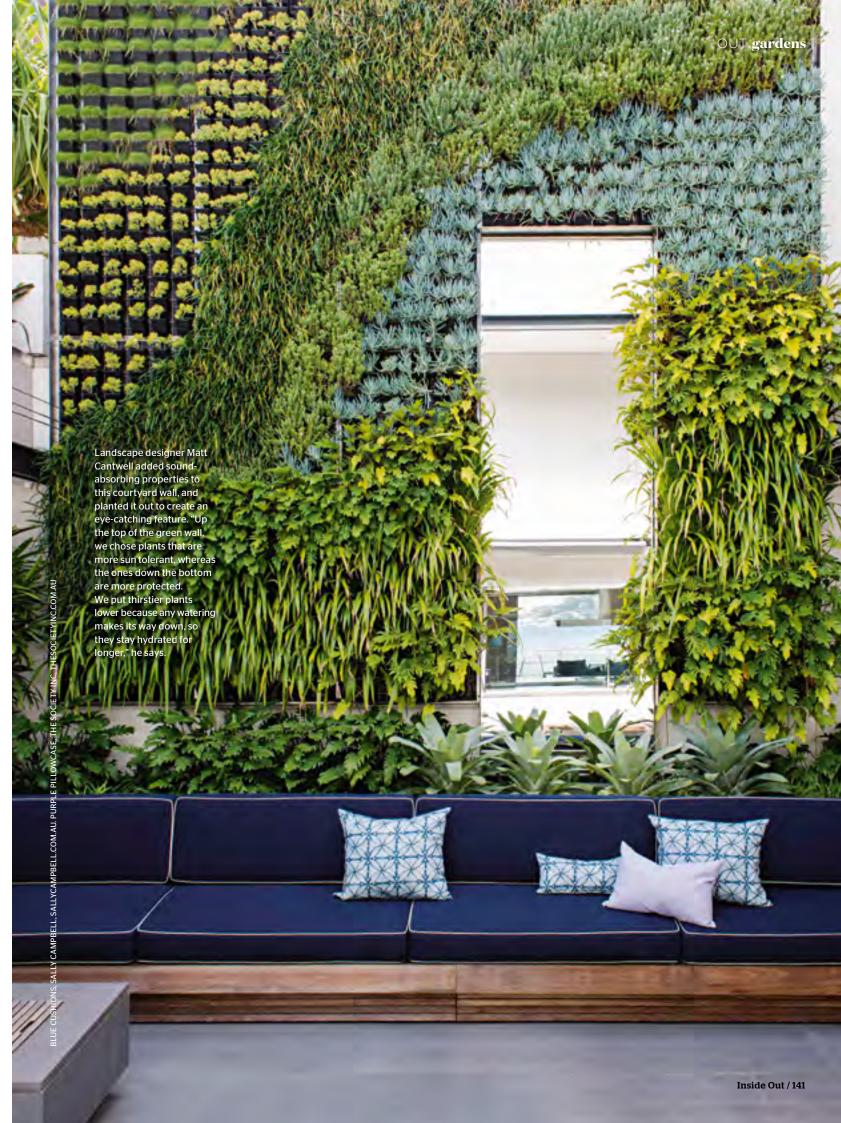


An incredible outlook was

marred by glare and noise, but smart landscape design gives this garden its five-star tag Noint of view





reaming 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 pictureperfect 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.









I/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.

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.

this passageway.

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

strength of the pointed leaves
- fantastic for coastal gardens.
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.

