



secret life

The elegant garden of this Sydney Federation home is filled with pretty pockets and leafy hideaways

WORDS JACKIE BRYGEL PHOTOGRAPHY NICHOLAS WATT



"GROWING UP, MY *favourite* BOOK WAS *THE SECRET GARDEN* AND I ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE THAT FOR MY OWN *family* ONE DAY" ~ AYNLEY



HOMEOWNER AND MUM-OF-TWO Aynsley had one thing in mind when it came to the overgrown outdoor space attached to her classic Federation home in Sydney: a vision of family-friendly relaxation throughout the seasons. "The garden that was here before was fairly non-existent," she remembers. "It was very minimal – there was just bumpy grass and everything was rather neglected."

Aynsley called upon senior landscape designer Robert Finnie of Secret Gardens to create several distinct zones linked by ambling paths and box-hedge-framed steps, including a new swimming pool, play areas for the children, a dining space and a chill-out zone. "It's a very evergreen garden and one that really does have a bit of something for everyone," says Robert. The pool and spa provide endless fun for the littlies, as do the expanses of soft, flat lawn. The entire family enjoys unwinding on lounges by the outdoor fireplace, and keen entertainer Aynsley has already held many dinner parties in the resort-like alfresco area, which is kitted out with a barbecue, sink and concealed fridge. >

First impressions After making their way down a bluestone-paved path through the front garden (opposite), visitors are greeted by a junior peace lily in an oversized reinforced-cement pot (left, for similar try Quatro Design). "It gets almost no sun, but it's a plant that works well both indoors and out, and it also gives a bit of a lush feel to the front of the property," says landscape designer Robert. A powder-coated steel gate in a contemporary decorative cut-out pattern adds another striking element of interest.



"THE *stepping stones* IN THE POOL LET YOU WALK ACROSS THE WATER. THEY'RE A NICE DETAIL"

~ ROBERT FINNIE, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER



< Sandstone pavers surround the pool, their creamy tone offset by expanses of greenery in the hedging, garden beds and lawn. Aynsley requested all-white flowering plants throughout. "I like the serenity of green, so I didn't want any flowers to stand out too much, but instead to be crisp and simple," she explains. "I like to have balance."

Casting his expert eye over the finished result, Robert is pleased to have achieved just that – and much more. "It's now a very secret space for the whole family to enjoy," he says, a sentiment that Aynsley shares. "This garden is so calming," she says. "People get a surprise when they come in, and everyone feels so at peace here."

Landscape designer Robert Finnie of Secret Gardens, call (02) 9314 5333 or visit secretgardens.com.au.

Cosy corner Broad steps lead down from the swim zone to another all-weather haven – the inviting outdoor living area, with comfy couches from Cosh Living (above). But it's the stainless-steel fireplace that demands the most attention. On the adjacent wall, Robert planted a creeping fig climber to create an eye-catching sculptural effect. "Eventually, the whole wall around the fireplace will become green," he says.

Blue crush The pool, lined with sparkling mosaic tiles, is framed by a handy feature when the sun gets too hot: a white steel pergola with an electronically retractable weatherproof fabric shade. "The pool faces west, so it was important that we provide shade," says Robert. A purpose-built shiplap timber cupboard at the rear of the pool provides a discreet home for towels, toys and pool equipment.

Dining out Aynsley was happy to relocate this chic stainless-steel, glass and white-mesh dining setting – originally found at Tecno Furniture – from her previous home. "It just seems to suit any sort of decor," she says. A shapely trio of pendants illuminates the table, giving the zone the feel of an outdoor room; for similar, try Cotton Love. Cooking for a crowd is a breeze thanks to a built-in barbecue, sink and fridge unit topped with Quarella stone in creamy 'Blanco Paloma' by Create Stone. **hb**



grand plans

Lay the groundwork to make your dream backyard a reality – in time for next summer

WORDS SHELLEY TUSTIN & JANE PARBURY



FRESH START

If a summer in your outdoor space has revealed some of its drawbacks, it could be time to rethink the whole area. Ask yourself practical questions about what you – and any children or pets – need from your garden. For example, “How many people do you typically entertain and how – that is, do you need an outdoor dining zone or a lounge area?” says landscape designer Robert Finnie of Secret Gardens. Write a list of necessities and luxuries and make sure you have at least the former covered.

When considering style, balance form and function, says Josh Harrison of Harrison's Landscaping. “Identify aesthetic strengths and develop ideas that will highlight them,” he says. “It's also important to reduce the impact of your garden's weaknesses, such as an ugly view.”

“TAKE NOTE OF NATURAL *light*
AND YOUR GARDEN'S ORIENTATION”

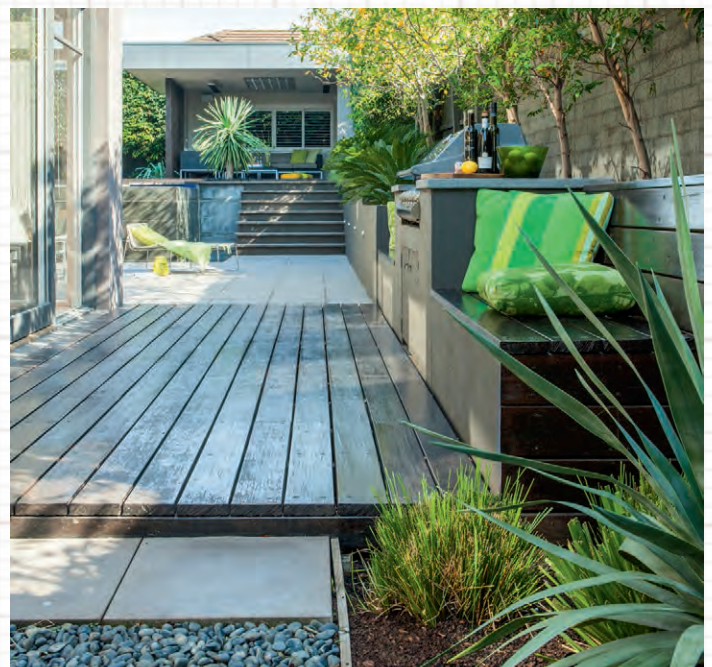
~ ROBERT FINNIE, SECRET GARDENS

SITE SPECIFICS

Establish from the outset whether you need planning permission for your proposed changes. Some minor building developments won't require approval, but you'll need to do your research to find out what's allowed in your area. Contact your council for a definitive answer, but as a general guideline, “You might need planning permission for building structures within boundary setbacks or over a certain size and height, for adding or amending pools or retaining walls over a certain height, front fence changes, major earthworks and alterations to the main building,” says Robert.

Also think about the shape and slope of your site. Raised planters could be an option if you need to elevate the soil level for screen planting, while a green wall is a smart solution for small spaces. >

A key planning consideration is maintenance. For the time-poor, high-quality synthetic turf pictured here in this Josh Harrison-designed garden, may be a more suitable option than lawn.



outdoors {design guide}



Fencing is an essential pool safety component – note that legislation is different in each state. Frameless glass fencing (pictured here and below) lends a barely there aesthetic.

“IDEALLY YOUR POOL SHOULD BE POSITIONED IN *partial shade*” ~ JOSH HARRISON, HARRISON'S LANDSCAPING

WATER WORKS

Sweltering through another Aussie summer might have convinced you that you need a pool. Different pools need different degrees of excavation and construction, and safety is paramount, so it's essential to call in the experts. As a first step, Andrew Donnola of Smart Landscaping Solutions suggests collecting photos of pool designs you like. “Ask friends what they like about their pool and what they would change,” he advises.

Make sure the size of the pool is in proportion to the remainder of the garden, advises Asher McGuckin of Secret Gardens, who designed this resort-style sanctuary (right). Think about how you want the pool to look from your home's interior: do you want it to act as a feature or to disappear into the landscape? This will affect essential safety fencing as well as the colour of your pool tiles. “Blade walls or feature screens can be incorporated into your design to double as a pool fence,” says Asher. “Also consider how the pool tiles will work with the existing palette of colours in the surrounding landscape or architecture.” **hb**



PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT) RHIANNON SLATTER, (TOP RIGHT) SHANIA SHEGEDYN, (BOTTOM RIGHT) NICK WATT