

Interior Design Awards winners revealed

AUSTRALIA

Alessi Design
Award announced



MILAN MAESTROS

Lindsey Adelman
STUDIOPEPE
Michael Anastassiades
RAW EDGES
Bethan Laura Wood
CECILIE MANZ
David Lopez Quincoces
ELISA OSSINO
Mae Engelgeer

Country
Chic
*our refined
rural escapes*

MILAN
REPORT
2018



LA DOLCE VITA

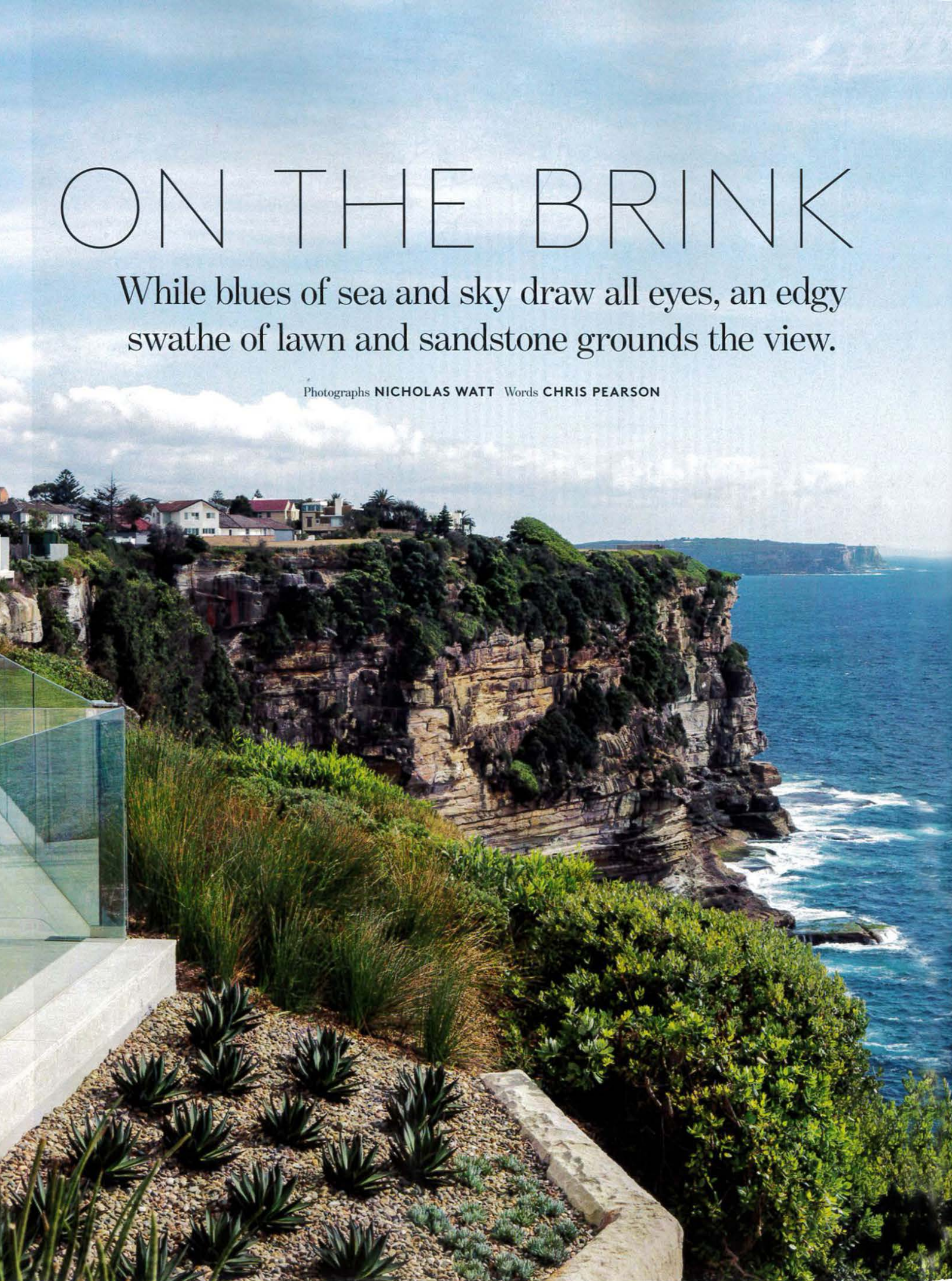
Beautiful homes from TUSCANY to SYDNEY



ON THE BRINK

While blues of sea and sky draw all eyes, an edgy swathe of lawn and sandstone grounds the view.

Photographs **NICHOLAS WATT** Words **CHRIS PEARSON**



GARDEN



This page from top Raven granite coping from Eco Outdoor was customised for the curved pool, with ironbark surrounds from the previous deck. The potted succulent is *Aloe plicatilis*. The entry's floating steps are interspersed with *Carissa macrocarpa* 'Desert Star'. Behind is *Sansevieria trifasciata* and an olive tree. The cladding is sandstone, and tiles are brush-finished Cocullo limestone from Eco Outdoor. Opposite page Below the lawn are plantings of *Agave* 'Blue Glow' and *Isolepis nodosa* and sandstone walls that echo the dramatic setting.

Perched on a clifftop 80 metres above the ocean, this eyrie could prove a challenge for a landscape designer with an aversion to heights. But Matt Cantwell of Secret Gardens found the project in Sydney's eastern suburbs so irresistible he quickly put aside his misgivings. That dizzying drawback was also the site's best asset – the view was jawdropping. "It is not often that you get to design a garden high above the ocean," he says. "The sight stops you in your tracks. The ocean is constantly changing. On sunny days with little wind, it appears calming, friendly and sparkling. On overcast days, it is darkly menacing. It can influence or reflect your mood. Not many sites can make that claim." Adding to the appeal, this would be the second time Matt had teamed up with Bruce Stafford Architects and the owners. "It is always exciting to work for the same client in creating a new garden for them," he says. "While we understand their tastes, the site and the house will be different, offering a unique set of challenges."

Three years on, while the view may be ever-changing the garden Matt has created possesses an immutability. It is so suited to the site, you could think it has always been there. When he first visited, however, and the previous house was on this site, he was taken aback. "Almost the entire garden on the ocean side had been covered in hardwood decking," he says. "It had created a quite hostile environment that felt hot and a bit abrasive, not like a garden at all."

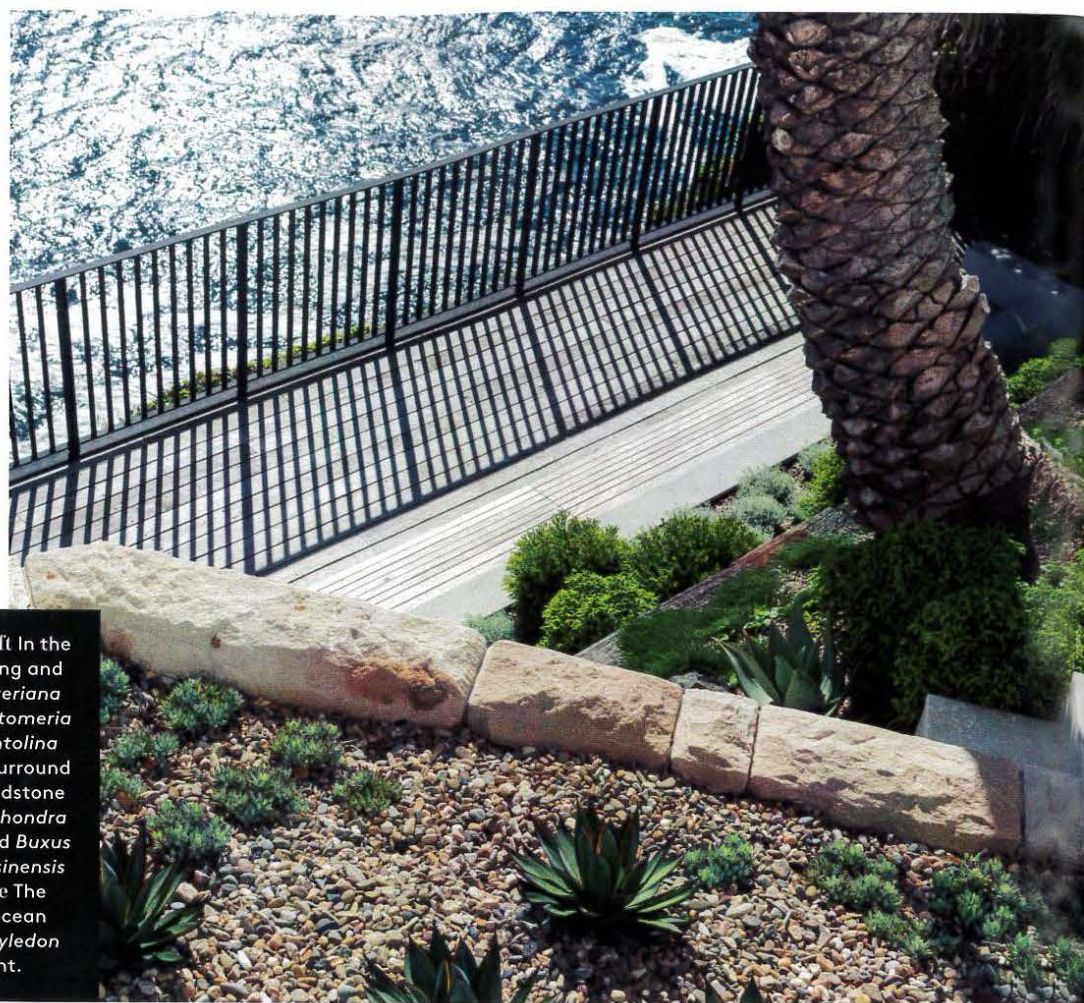
The owners asked him to design all the outdoor areas, including the entry (a sliver of garden close to the street), a side garden and the largest, most important area extending between the house and the cliff, abutting the living areas and soaking up the spectacular views.

The brief was less is more. "It has one of the best views in Sydney, but I could appreciate the owners' feedback that it can get a little hectic, as there is so much going on," Matt says. "They wanted an uncomplicated layout that achieved a balance between hard and soft surfaces. The architect achieved an outlook from nearly every room. We did not want to compete with too much clutter." The garden is mostly on one level and stone tiling, connecting to the living areas and complementing the house colours, provides a simple, effective





This page, clockwise from top left in the lookout is built-in cedar seating and screening with a *Howea forsteriana* palm. Agave 'Blue Glow', *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Globosa Nana', *Santolina chamaecyparissus* and aloes surround a large Phoenix palm. The sandstone side path is surrounded by *Dichondra repens*, *Yucca elephantipes* and *Buxus microphylla* with *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Adagio' grass. Opposite page The expansive zoysia lawn and ocean views. Bowl planted with *Cotyledon macrantha* or paddle plant.



unifying framework. "Apart from dining areas, there is little provision for shade outdoors," he says. "It would have been excess clutter and, with the great link of indoors with out, plus vast areas of glazing, it wasn't needed. It's all about the ocean connection."

To help achieve this simplicity, Matt included a vast lawn, surprising perhaps in such a harsh location, but made possible with zoysia turf, perfect for the conditions with its deep roots, drought tolerance and low maintenance. The horizontal green expanse is a striking counterpoint to the grey-blue vista of sea and sky beyond. Creating a lookout four metres below the lawn was a huge challenge. Working with Bruce, the engineer and builder, he created a surprise destination as a retreat from the house and other areas, in recycled timber. "This is a place to escape to, to get even closer to the ocean and take in its full splendour or fury, depending on its mood," he says.

For the entry, Matt created big impact from a small area. "The floating, staggered stairs with the sloping garden are a refreshing change from the usual mix of regimented stairs with raised rendered planters," he says. "This, combined with the hardwood front door, provides an organic element in the strong, white facade." A simple, cohesive materials palette creates a synergy between garden, house and setting. Because the interior finishes are subdued, predominantly white and low contrast, Matt extended that to the garden materials. Flooring, walling and outdoor furniture all sport neutral tones. "And the stone walling's texture and warmth, at the entry and down to the lookout, provides a subtle link to the sandstone cliff."

Plantings include robust species tolerant of windy, saline and full-sun coastal environments, such as the zoysia, succulents comprising yuccas, agaves and aloes, grasses and palms, including an existing Phoenix palm that towers over the lookout, now one of Matt's favourite features. "I love this little escape that, to this day, still challenges my apprehension about heights," he says. That instantly evaporates as he stands there, mesmerised by that majestic expanse of ocean in all its mercurial moods. secretgardens.com.au

GARDEN



"THIS IS A PLACE TO ESCAPE TO, TO GET EVEN CLOSER TO THE OCEAN AND TAKE IN ITS FULL SPLENDOUR OR FURY, DEPENDING ON ITS MOOD."