

outdoor special  
*London calling*



## URBAN LEGEND

Inspired by classic London terraces, this Sydney rooftop garden is the ultimate inner-city escape

WORDS CATHERINE McCORMACK PHOTOGRAPHY NICHOLAS WATT



## the high life

The owners of this rooftop retreat craved a quiet nook for reading and playing music. Perfectly positioned by the pond, the spotted gum bench seat has a tall backrest. "The owners were concerned their young children might climb onto the bench seat and spill over," explains landscape designer Mark Curtis. "So we exaggerated the backrest to become a balustrade."



**A LOVE OF MUSIC** and English gardens led the owners of this rooftop terrace to give it a fresh new look. "They wanted to create a soothing environment where family and friends could enjoy each other's company and sit down to a meal on a summer's evening," says Mark Curtis, design manager of Secret Gardens, who spearheaded the project. "Plus we needed to provide a spot where the husband – a keen musician – could come out and play."

To refresh the garden, which had been neglected for some time, the long courtyard was laid with bluestone pavers, with a level change introduced at one end. "The design is modelled loosely on London town gardens with those long, linear plots," says Mark. "This creates a sensation of distinct 'rooms' within the garden."

Retaining walls along the boundary help to define each area. In the centre is a three-tiered water feature, beside which are two bench seats, purpose-built for reading or strumming away. A few steps further is a hardwood pergola, framed by a row of magnolia 'Little Gem' trees which produce scented white flowers in summer. Nearby, the lacy flowerheads of oakleaf hydrangea float out over a retaining wall. At the house-end of the garden, an established Japanese maple was craned in to create a strong focal point. "It provides a canopy to offer scale, form and a bit of respite from the sun," says Mark. "And because its leaves turn in the autumn, it gives a real sense of seasonal change."

Now a few years old and even more established, the rooftop has become a sought-after sanctuary. "The family is delighted with how the garden's come about," says Mark. And thanks to its thoughtful new design, music can be heard amongst the trees every day.



## water lines

In the centre of the courtyard is a three-tiered brick water feature. The lower level is home to fish, which swim under floating water lillies, and liriopé was planted in the borders.



### *salvaged style*

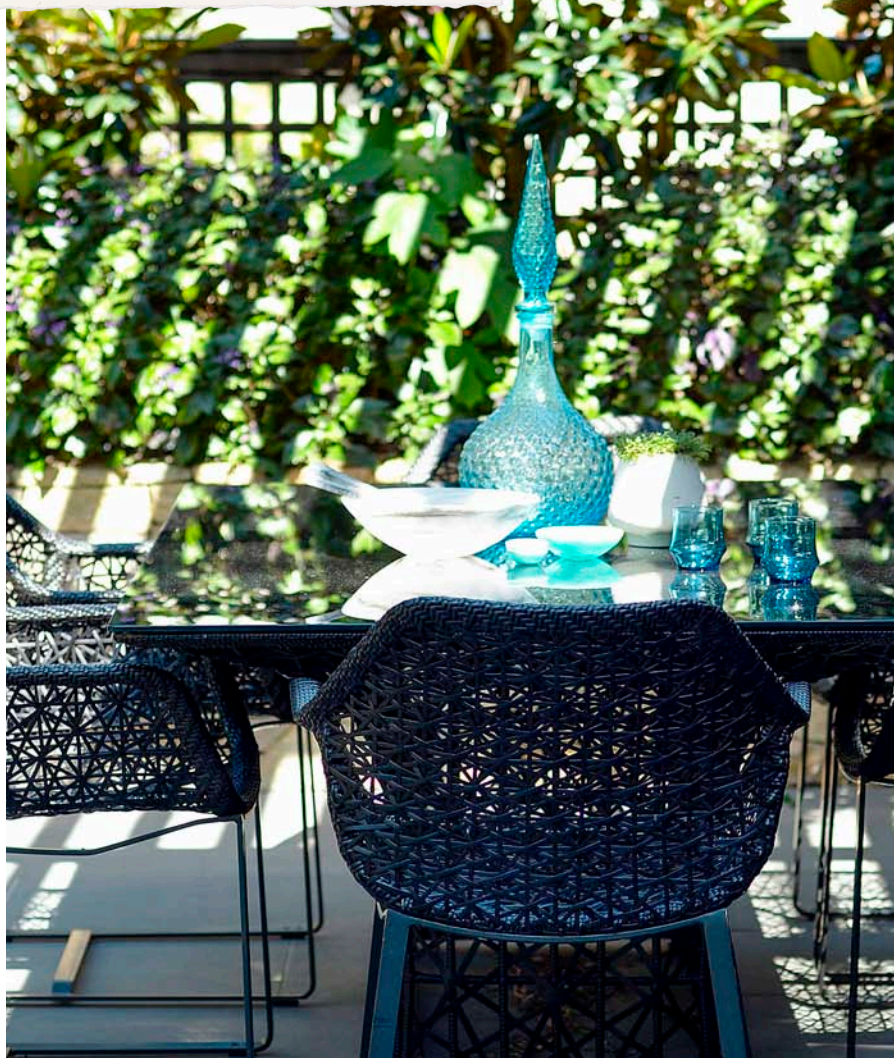
The owners wanted a garden that looked like it had been there forever, so landscape designer Mark turned to reclaimed materials.

Old sandstone blocks from the house were used in the walling, while bricks from the original garden were used to build the water feature. >





*fine dining* The chic dining space is shaded by a pergola made from weathered ironbark timber (pictured page 195). The Patricia Urquiola for Kettal 'Maia' dining table comfortably seats six and brings a sophisticated London look.



## design tips

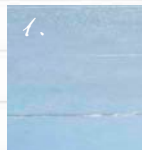
### *sensory garden*

To enhance a small garden or terrace, designer Mark Curtis suggests creating a sensory experience. "Screen out or filter views to nearby properties and borrow what the surrounding landscape can offer if desirable." The soft trickle of a water feature adds atmosphere, while a pergola will help pull down the sky, creating intimacy. And for visual impact, turn to plants. "A plant palette should contain a mix of scale, texture, colour and form," he says. "They need to blur the boundaries and invite the eye to travel through the layers."

## materials

### *key features*

1. **PAVING:** Sawn bluestone, \$99.99/sqm, Eco Outdoor.
2. **CLADDING:** Alpine dry stone, from \$133.32/sqm, Eco Outdoor.
3. **PERGOLA:** Recycled ironbark, from \$30/lineal metre, Ironwood Australia.



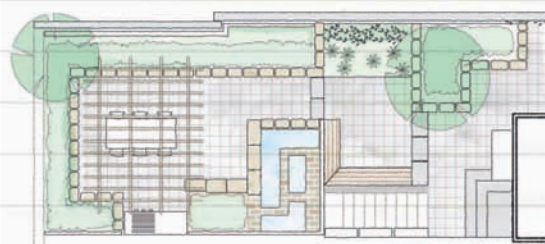
**KEY PLANTS:** Oakleaf hydrangea 'Snow Queen', Japanese maple, slender weaver bamboo, magnolia, Boston ivy.



### *rich palette*

The garden is dominated by the bluestone paving and stone walls, so Mark deliberately went for plants that would complement the brown and grey tones. In spring and summer, the garden erupts in flowers of white, silver and purple, while in autumn, a warmer palette emerges, when the foliage of plants such as Japanese maple and oakleaf hydrangea take on tones of red and gold.

## plans



**LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** Secret Gardens, (02) 9314 5333, [secretgardens.com.au](http://secretgardens.com.au).



## get the look

Achieve smart inner-city style with pieces that are at once modern and relaxed



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1. 'Svinga' hanging seat, \$149, Ikea. 2. Flip & Tumble felt planter, \$22, Modplanters. 3. 'Boracay' side table, \$681, Globe West. 4. 'Osteria' glasses, \$92.95/set of 6, Williams-Sonoma. 5. 'Finkornig' bowl, \$19.99, Ikea. 6. 'Forest' granite pavers, from \$109/sqm, Eco Outdoor. 7. 'Miner' lantern, \$11.72, Bunnings. 8. 'Airplantman' planter frame, \$200, Modplanters. 9. 'Crackenback' free-form walling, \$122/sqm, Eco Outdoor. 10. Bench, \$649, Equator Homewares. 11. 'Gaspar' chair, \$450, Satara. [Stockists, page 212](#)