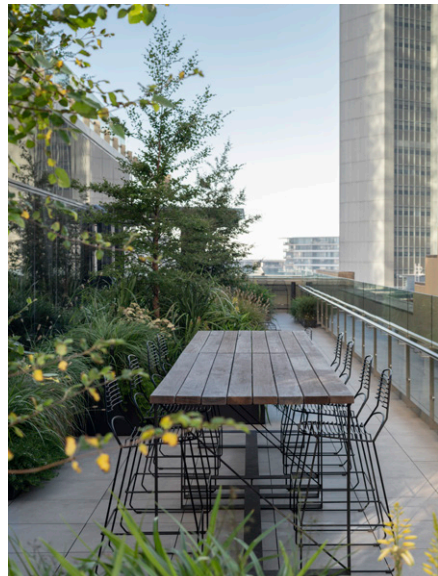




# Skyline by Secret Gardens

Circular Quay, New South Wales, Australia

Words by Aaron Grinter • Photography by Nicholas Watt



Eight floors up, in the heart of Circular Quay, Secret Gardens has created a verdant sanctuary for the staff of investment firm Platinum Asset Management, inspired by the revolutionary green spaces of the New York Highline. Covering 335 square metres across two levels, Skyline is a calming escape from the high-intensity world of finance, the ever-present obligation of the Sydney CBD screened out by abundant foliage that provides the occasional glimpse of the harbour below.

Working to an open brief for versatile spaces that would encourage staff to stretch their legs and get some fresh air, Secret Gardens created an open and unimposing environment, a series of connected resting places with no set purpose, where staff can bring their own meaning to each space – for informal meetings, focus time or stepping away from the desk to have lunch. Ample furniture abounds, with sun-bleached timber benches, dining sets, barstools and armchairs providing a variety of inspiration for staff to create the experience they're seeking at any given moment. Hunza light fittings are strategically positioned throughout for when the afternoon meetings turn into after work drinks.

The physical architecture of the space is created by approximately 90 steel planters, arranged to create pathways and secluded coves. The planters are painted for durability in flat black epoxy, echoing the finish of the Sydney Harbour Bridge visible below, while also fluctuating in their shapes and sizes, creating a sense of height variation and

providing depth for the larger trees. The planters follow a 600-millimetre grid set by a floating tile system, the calm grey arrangement creating stable flooring while concealing electrical work and drainage. The grid also allows for flexibility as the planters can be moved and reconfigured to any layout within the grid pattern.

The refined monochromatic tones of the design recede gently against the vibrant green and occasional colour of the plantings. From the largest planters rise deciduous black birch trees, large hardy plants that can withstand the harsh elements of the exposed rooftop and eventually growing into a canopy. The understory is a mix of ornamental and native grasses, perennials and succulents, scattered abundantly to provide depth and visual interest. Thick straps of lomandras form medium structures, interspersed with spreading grasses, myoporums and aloes, the gaps occasionally punctuated with yellow satin flowers, kangaroo paws and red Pennisetum flowers. Mexican daisies and flowering succulents provide splashes of soft white and pink, cultivating a sense of homely familiarity.

Secret Gardens has created a verdant escape that invites staff to leave their worries at the door and relax into nature, the robust yet versatile steel planters providing just enough structure to instil a sense of escape and security. The verdant species throughout, chosen for their balance of hardiness and soft features, sway gently in the breeze to create a lulling sense of calm.