



# WOOLLAHRA GARDEN — SECRET GARDENS

Words by Jackson Hides • Photography by Nicholas Watt • Architecture by Marston Architects • Landscape by Secret Gardens





Charged with designing a garden that would blend classic and contemporary elements and enhance the architecture, Secret Gardens has created a study in simplicity, with clean lines and effortless plantings that complement, rather than compete with, the residence.

With the clients also expressing a desire for low-maintenance vegetation that would allow abundant natural light into the garden, especially in winter, it fell to Secret Gardens to recognise the history of the site and add to that story with a modern and uncomplicated design. Working closely alongside Marston Architects throughout the building process, the final results were achieved on the back of a highly collaborative effort that enhanced the practicality of the outdoor space for a young family.

This collaborative approach ultimately played a large part in informing the decisions made across the project. Through conversations with both architect and client, Secret Gardens founder Matt Cantwell realised that “it was important that the garden would not be too high maintenance and that it would hold a consistent form during the seasons, rather than being too seasonal.” With the main pedestrian entrance shifted to the side of the house, he explains that a low-key planting scheme was agreed upon

so as to not confuse the architecture. Stepping-stones were added from the front of the property, creating a sense of welcoming informality that is in keeping with the rest of the garden.

As one journeys through the garden, the attention to detail afforded to each species planted becomes more apparent. *Cephalotaxus harringtonia* ‘Fastigiata’, otherwise known as Japanese plum yew, has been planted in rows at the front, providing a backdrop to the *Kalanchoe hildebrandtii*, or silver spoons, behind. The result is a front garden that can be easily contained, will not grow too tall and still allows the clients a filtered view to the street. A red *Bougainvillea* and oriental pearl round out the front garden, providing pops of colour and mimicking the circular polished concrete stepping-stones. In the backyard, the bay tree was chosen as a species that would grow to a height that provided privacy and screened neighbouring properties but without becoming taller than desired.







The garden has been designed with a simplicity in mind that remains constant throughout the seasons.

Matt explains that the plantings are reasonably consistent throughout the project and again are demonstrative of Secret Gardens' commitment to the brief. "Keeping the number of species down makes for a simple, easy on the eye effect that is easier to maintain. Excess structure can take up valuable planting space and become a bit of a distraction." This notion extends to the low-impact sleepers and retaining walls that have been implemented throughout as well. "We used folded steel edges along the side access to step the planting rather than slope. Treated pine sleeper retaining walls were used for minor changes in level around the lower part of the garden to create minimal impact on the roots of a neighbouring eucalyptus."

For Secret Gardens, however, the crowning achievement of this garden is balance – not just in how it fulfils the needs of the client but in how it fits into the broader architectural and neighbourhood context. "The garden here matches the interior and exterior of the home. Simple details, well executed, so when you move through the entire property there is a distinct feeling of harmony. The classic gestures are as strong as the modern ones and no direction feels stronger than the other," Matt reflects. The result is a magnificent family garden that fits seamlessly into the clients' lifestyles as well as it does its surrounds.