

all decked out

Deftly combining light and shade, an uninspiring backyard steps up to the demands of family living



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Landscape designer Henry Chapple-Cox, of Secret Gardens, upgraded the pool with a new nib wall in Taubmans Teal Vortex, with plant troughs suspended from the side wall. A candelabra spurge (*Euphorbia 'Ammak'*) cactus is a Palm Springs-inspired statement, underplanted with jade plant (*Crassula ovata 'Gollum'*). The trough includes aloe 'Bush Baby', fishbone cactus (*Cryptocereus anthonyanus*) and snake plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), with devil's ivy (*Epipremnum spp.*) as a cascading counterpoint.

OPPOSITE A mistletoe cactus (*Rhipsalis spp.*) softens the vertical lines of spotted gum battens placed by Henry over an existing steel framework to create dappled shade. The foxtail fern (*Asparagus densiflorus 'Meyersii'*) is a green focal point and kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*) toe-teasing ground cover. Bluestone steppers, Eco Outdoor.

This handsome hideaway in Sydney's eastern suburbs is invitingly green in more ways than one. It cleverly repurposes an existing deck, pool and even a wall of bamboo to deliver a luxuriant retreat for a young couple with a toddler and their dog.

When its creator, Henry Chapple-Cox, design manager at Secret Gardens, first visited in 2018, he was met with a jarring study in contrasts. A hardwood deck abutting the house was exposed to full sun and offered no respite – while in the dark garden below, grass struggled to grow under untamed bamboo along the back boundary. “The lower area was unloved and claustrophobic, and not where you would want to spend time, thanks to the overpowering bamboo, while the deck was open and uncovered,” says Henry. In the blink of a dazzled eye, the garden went from one extreme to the other – “glary to dark”. It was little wonder the owners rarely used the rear garden and were, ahem, bamboo-zled about what to do with it.

When they upgraded the interiors of the home they had bought in 2017, they put the garden on notice, too. “In their brief, they needed a space to complement the renovated interiors,” says Henry. “They wanted to be enticed into the garden, where they could fully enjoy an inside-outside space. The pool, deck and lawn were all there, but they wanted to use them more and team them with thriving, healthy plants that worked where they were.”

Using an existing open steel structure repainted black as the framework, Henry enclosed the hardwood deck in spotted gum battens on the top and two sides, with a motorised retractable awning to cater for hot and rainy days. The battens screen the space from the neighbours, offering privacy, but also let in filtered light, while the timber adds warmth. “We left it unoiiled, so it turns grey and needs little maintenance,” he says. “The pergola frames the outdoor space and gives it intimacy.”

Meanwhile, an off-form concrete bench was installed, with white oxide in the mix to complement the new light and airy interiors, for a barbecue with storage underneath. Taking its design cues from the kitchen inside, the bench also flows into the courtyard below, where it morphs into an informal seat for entertaining. “Concrete is often misinterpreted as being too industrial or hard-edged for garden areas,” explains Henry, “but it has an almost rustic quality when surrounded by greenery and you can form it into anything you like.” Bluestone steppers add depth and interest to this lower area. “Bluestone wears well, darkens with age and teams nicely with concrete.”

To promote a sense of enclosure and hide pool equipment, Henry inserted a blade wall painted a rich teal beside the pool. It's supplemented by three plant troughs suspended along the adjoining wall, to “green up” the area and soften the view from the living area. He also trimmed the bamboo to create a screen that bathes the area below in dappled light. “We lifted the canopy to give the space depth, while making it less unruly,” he says.



ABOVE Thanks to the revamp by Secret Gardens, this is now an enticing indoor-outdoor space and a fitting complement to the home's interior, designed by Woods & Warner. A motorised awning ensures the deck can be used rain or shine. The concrete bench was poured on site, with white oxide added, to create a unified line of vision. It extends from the garden to the deck, and indoors to a bench under the TV and the kitchen bench beyond.

This lush, secluded spot is a particular favourite of Henry's, with its concrete bench and dappled light a dramatic contrast to the jarring darkness and glare he was originally confronted with. Foxtail fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Meyersii') in pot by Hiberate. The foliage at the back includes shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*), Swiss cheese plant (*Monstera deliciosa*) and a stand of existing giant bamboo (*Dendrocalamus* spp.) neatly trimmed and underplanted with Japanese holly fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum*).



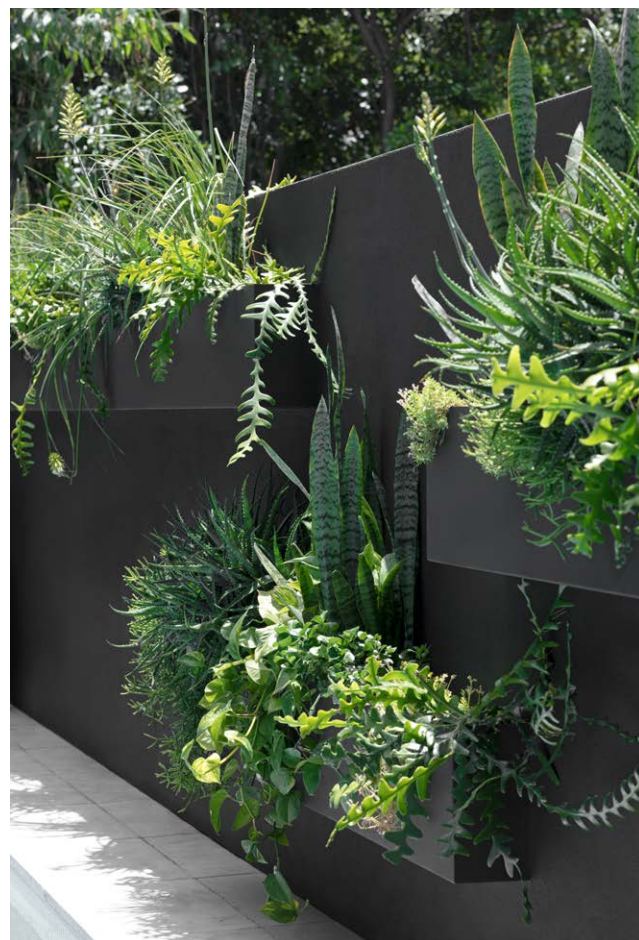
Below her, Henry replaced failed turf with kidneyweed (*Dichondra repens*), a tough-as-nails alternative to conventional lawns with few of the hassles of upkeep. “It likes water and both shade and sun,” says Henry. The bamboo is underplanted with swathes of lush ferns including Japanese holly fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum*), button fern (*Pellaea rotundiflora*) and hen and chicken fern (*Asplenium bulbiferum*), all at home in a shaded area that retains water. “It’s a match made in heaven,” says Henry.

Swiss cheese plant (*Monstera deliciosa*), *Dracaena deremensis* ‘Janet Craig’ and shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*) sit behind the bench, with their large, luxuriant leaves “chosen for the colours and shapes”. A mistletoe cactus (*Rhipsalis* spp.) plays against the spotted gum battens “to bring the garden into the pergola”.

Beside the pool, a mix of foliage plants in the troughs, including succulents snake plant (*Sansevieria* spp.) and fishbone cactus (*Cryptocereus anthonyanus*), are teamed with devil’s ivy (*Epipremnum* spp.) and “stick up and over the green wall”, while a statuesque candelabra tree (*Euphorbia candelabrum*) dominates the corner and adds height and gravitas.

Henry’s favourite possie? “I like the lower bench seat and the monstera and ferns behind it, with the contrasting colours and textures,” he says. Now the perfect blend of light and shade, coupled with a curated planting palette, this suburban garden soothes both the eye and the soul. **10**

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THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) Underplanted with jade plant (*Crassula ovata* ‘Gollum’), the candelabra spurge (*Euphorbia* ‘Ammak’) is presented in a suitably handsome pot by Hibernata. The troughs on the pool wall are planted out in tough, sun-tolerant and splash-tolerant varieties. On the deck, a Medusa’s head (*Euphorbia flanaganii* ‘Medusa’), in a pot by Hibernata, is a fantastic choice as it relishes full sunlight but is also shade-tolerant.

OPPOSITE The revitalised deck is entertaining central, thanks to comfy, laidback Aireys Woven lounge chairs from Cosh Living. Barbecue, BeefEater.



OUT

art decko!

An old spotted gum deck finally finds its place in the sun

This gorgeous garden in Sydney's eastern suburbs gives green spaces a whole new meaning. Yes, it's undeniably verdant, but it deftly recycles an existing spotted gum deck, pool and a stand of bamboo – and makes them the centrepieces of an inspired new design. The old space was glary and dark at the same time. Now it is an inviting enclave for a young couple with a toddler and their pooch, and a true sanctuary for all seasons.

Turn the page for more details.

AIREYS WOVEN LOUNGE CHAIRS AND TOSCA COFFEE TABLE, COSH LIVING