



A cascading purple wisteria will adorn the hardwood pergola in the coming months.

BEYOND BORDERS

THIS ENCHANTING GARDEN IN THE NSW SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVIDES AN INVITING RESPITE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

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GARDEN *Kangaloon NSW*



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT The garden wall was built using locally sourced stone; towering miscanthus grass frames the mountain views; lush greenery lines the verandah. FACING PAGE, FROM TOP The outdoor dining table sits by the alfresco kitchen and fire pit. Corten steel framing encloses the kitchen garden beds.

A WANDER THROUGH THIS YOUNG GARDEN in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, on Dharawal land, is inevitably accompanied by the enormous, soaring sound of the wind massaging the aged pine trees on the boundary. Take a pause, and the layered soundscape reveals the twitter of tiny birds as they flit and hop. There's the crunch of a gravel pathway underfoot and the buzz of honey-drunk bees circumnavigating syrup-fragranced blooms. Every once in a while, a dairy cow bellows from a paddock nearby.

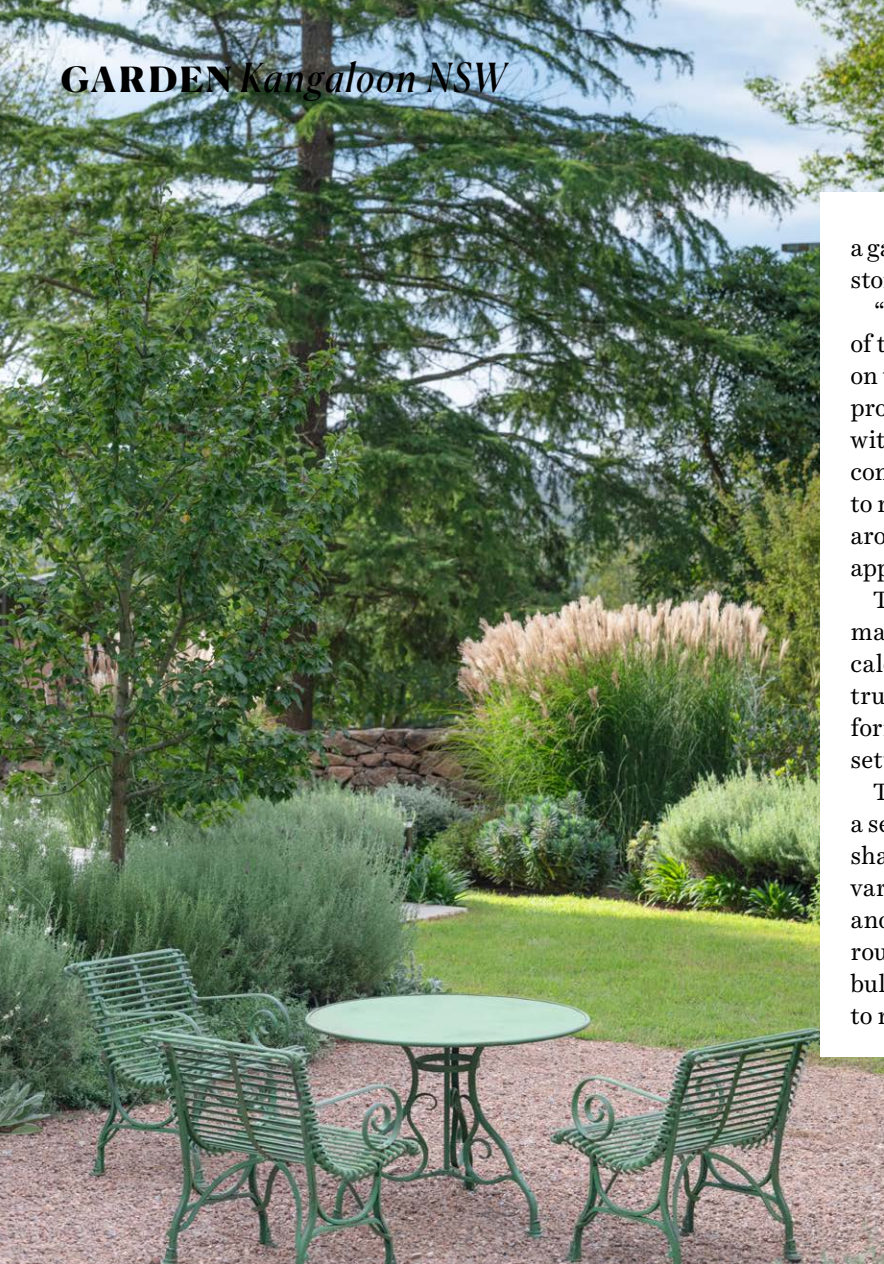
Settled on a hill in Kangaloon – a rural enclave with a population of a few hundred on one of the Highlands' highest points – the garden is a carefully cultivated landscape that invites exploration and a connection to all the senses. Even more compelling is its ability to tether its occupants to the green ridges and valleys beyond.

The house and garden form a weekend retreat for a Sydney-based family with four energetic children and a dog. The entire property encapsulates 26 hectares, with the garden around the house amounting to about half a hectare.

When landscape designer Matthew Cantwell and his team at Secret Gardens first visited three years ago, the grounds were overgrown and neglected, featuring an old, sludgy swimming pool and no prominent wayfinding elements. Parts of the yard had been cleared for a single-storey extension to the south-facing rear of the home, and the homeowners and their architect, Emma Lee Architecture, had designed >



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a garden wall made of local stone to complement the home’s stone frontage.

“Our client is relaxed and very trusting,” says Matthew of the couple who previously engaged Secret Gardens to work on their city garden. The loose brief for their modern country property encompassed “prettiness and seasonal colour”, with defined zones for large family gatherings and quiet contemplation. “A fundamental part of the overall design was to make sure we’re encouraging people to venture all the way around the garden,” says Matthew, describing the conceptual approach that underpins any Secret Gardens project.

The transformation was extensive, beginning with the main entry’s circular driveway, which features a carefully calculated turning circle to allow easy egress for a fire truck. Through the stonewall gate, a north-facing courtyard forms an inviting winter garden with a green outdoor table setting and a perfect patch of lawn.

The intimate, protected space is contained further by a series of deciduous ornamental pear trees that provide shade in summer and much-needed winter sun. Evergreen varieties such as the licorice plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*) and Indian hawthorn (*Rhaphiolepis indica*) ensure year-round structure and lush texture. “The Indian hawthorn is bulletproof,” says Matthew. “It’s drought tolerant and easy to manipulate into many different shapes.” >



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“In Australian garden design, we’re certainly seeing a shift towards more texture with ornamental grasses, native plants and perennials,” says landscape designer Matthew Cantwell. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** A north-facing courtyard forms an inviting winter garden complete with ornamental pear trees and evergreen Indian hawthorn. “I think it’s my favourite part of the garden,” says Matthew; the home’s main entrance is heralded by a manicured circular driveway with plenty of parking spaces for the family’s guests.



FROM LEFT Japanese windflowers add a delicate pop of white amid the green growth; Pride of Madeira grows adjacent to the rear of the home, which overlooks the lawn and valley beyond.



A gravel pathway meanders to the western side of the home, traversing borders that spill with a bountiful combination of gaura (butterfly bush), Italian lavender, oakleaf hydrangea and Mediterranean spurge. This lively, densely planted scheme opens up to reveal spectacular valley views to the west and terracing that addresses the gentle slope while creating a series of functional zones.

The generous outdoor dining table sits below a hardwood pergola that will, in time, become engulfed in the cascading purple blooms of sweetly scented wisteria. “There’s also the outdoor kitchen and the fire pit, which we oriented in a way that encourages people to gather around it,” Matthew adds.

Six steps up from the garden’s social open heart is a kitchen garden with Corten steel-framed beds. Ornamentals and perennials, such as the aromatic agastache, grow among the herbs and vegies, attracting pollinators and filling the beds with colour and texture.

To spend time on this property is to commune with nature – especially on a breezy day when the array undulates and ripples with the wind. “I don’t want a static garden,” says Matthew. “I want one that moves and tells me what the day is doing before I even walk outside.” Strategically placed

mounds of the tall ornamental grass *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Gracillimus’ do the trick here, with their elegant plumed blades waving dynamically and capturing the sunlight. “It’s captivating sitting in that garden, watching the whole thing sway and shift around you,” Matthew shares.

The outdoorsy homeowners embrace rural living when they escape the city and retreat to Kangaloon. The kids ride dirt bikes around the sprawling acreage beyond the existing Monterey pines (*Pinus radiata*) and they help their parents with maintenance jobs on the land.

“The property is far more extensive than the fences suggest,” says Matthew. “It was important to take advantage of the backdrop and work with this to blur the boundaries between the main garden and the surrounding mature trees and rolling hills.” With the limits disappearing, the dialogue between garden and valley is clear for the family to tune into and enjoy on all sensory levels. *CF*

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