

## SECRET GARDENS

### BRACKEN

McKenzies Beach, Malua Bay, New South Wales, Australia, 2023



In 2019 fire swept through this McKenzies Beach property south of Malua Bay, on the traditional lands of the Yuin nation, and then suffered further damage from a fierce hailstorm the following year. The aim of the new 0.8-hectare (2-acre) garden design by Sydney-based practice Secret Gardens, under the creative directorship of Matthew Cantwell, was to complement the local geology and the strongly rectilinear lines of the house, and to marry the building more sustainably with its surroundings. Views through the blackened trunks of beautiful *Corymbia maculata*

(spotted gums) to the water were a stark reminder of the fires that have been catastrophic in parts of the south coast of New South Wales, and provided the impetus for the new design to provide enhanced fire protection. This meant pushing planting further from the house and providing useable level, grassed, gravelled or tiled areas close to the dwelling. Stone retaining walls and terraces of weathered Corten steel and locally sourced gravel complement the site's natural character. *Macrozamia communis* (burrawang), *Doryanthes excelsa* (gyMEA lily), *Westringia*

*fruticosa* (coastal rosemary), *Banksia integrifolia* (coast banksia) and local grass species, including *Poa billardierei* (beach fescue), are supplemented with architecturally striking, exotic agaves. Greater engagement with the landscape is encouraged by meandering paths across the property, which boasts spectacular views through a tracery of tree trunks to the beach and headland across the bay. This is a garden that is respectful to its site and – remarkably for an area that is often windy – exudes tranquillity.