

STATE OF THE ART

A carefully curated mix of complementary and contrasting plants gives this garden an assorted style that feels anchored in its environment

WORDS BRITTANY SMITH | PHOTOGRAPHY NICHOLAS WATT

ALL PAINT COLOURS MAY VARY ON APPLICATION

Ephemeral art In many ways, creating a garden is similar to painting. At least, that's what landscape designer Henry Chapple-Cox finds. "It's a living picture that evolves over time," the senior associate at Secret Gardens says, "which the client will see every day of their life." For this facade, Henry wove a tapestry of coastal banksia, two varieties of dragon tree and Magnolia grandiflora 'Little Gem'. Front-facing windows and an upper-level balcony feel immersed in the garden, thanks to trailing rosemary, which drapes over rendered walls. The driveway is paved with Eco Outdoor 'Endicott Filetti' natural stone. >

Walking tracks wind along the harbour in this suburb on Sydney's Lower North Shore, dipping in and out of secluded bays. Yet in the midst of this wild beauty, this house and garden, belonging to a couple with teenage children, was stifled. "There wasn't a strong inside-outside connection," recalls Henry Chapple-Cox, landscape designer at Secret Gardens. "There was no visual interest in terms of planting and foliage. It was blocky. Established hedges dominated the front and rear gardens."

And so an extensive renovation began, transforming the exterior, as well as the home itself. Working collaboratively with an architect, Henry created a garden that spoke to its surrounds, including a pool that felt anchored in the environment and alfresco zones that ensured the homeowners and their young adult children could entertain simultaneously, yet separately. Upon seeing the finished garden, the owners had "a light-bulb moment," says Henry, who was on site for the big reveal. "I thought 'that's why we do what we do.'"

IN THE ZONE

The back garden has three key zones, offering opportunities for connection, play and also retreat. The covered terrace has ample room for alfresco dining and living, as well as a cooking zone with a built-in barbecue. Beyond that is the pool, which benefits from a sunken design, surrounded by garden beds overflowing with soft grasses and succulents. Finally, a fire pit is paired with a curved seat that stretches across the garden's back boundary, inviting people to delve deeper into the space. "Locating the fire pit at the end was a deliberate decision," says Henry, "especially with a family where older kids might want to retreat somewhere."

Back space The boundary is home to a forest of bamboo, which belongs to the neighbours, so Henry incorporated a hedge of strappy *Podocarpus henkelii* as an additional border. Hardy *Lomandra longifolia* 'Tanika' grass pairs with *Kalanchoe bracteata* 'Silver Spoons', a silvery succulent with velvety foliage. These all create a serene backdrop for the Corten steel fire pit, supplied by Hibernite. Paired with a built-in curved concrete bench with a teak backrest, it ensures the garden is enjoyed in all seasons. >



Missing link Prior to the work, a tall Canary Island date palm (above) stood out awkwardly, yet provided a sense of scale. As such, Henry extended the concrete planter that houses the barbecue, encompassing the tree and creating a visual link between the interior and exterior. Lush plantings of Agave ‘Blue Glow’, Liriope muscari ‘Evergreen Giant’, star jasmine and walking iris (below) complete the tableau. Step it up Pittosporum tobira ‘Miss Muffet’ and shell ginger frame the steps (opposite).



PLANT PALETTE

Many of the reigning philosophies of interior design and architecture also ring true in gardens. For example, while complementary features are necessary, contrast is king. “You need foliage in contrasting forms and colours,” says Henry, who juxtaposes light and dark hues with thin and thick foliage to create a harmonious whole. As such, the palette is a diverse blend of succulent-style plantings, looser forms to soften the hedges, and the occasional perennial. Together, they create a low-maintenance oasis. As Henry explains, “There’s a method to the madness.” >

MATERIAL WORLD

From the front garden to the backyard, there are many cohesive through lines. Murobond's micaceous paint in Pavilion appears on the steel handrail in the entrance and is repeated on the steel fencing around the pool. The fire pit features Corten steel and a teak-batten backrest above an off-form concrete bench. The latter is a hero material and one that Henry is especially proud of. "Concrete is really interesting in a garden because it has connotations for being industrial," he says. "But it wears really well," especially when it has a subtle sheen.

Splashing out A garden bed surrounds the sunken pool (this page & opposite), filled with plants, such as dwarf cardamom, which spill through the steel fence to tickle the floor of the alfresco dining area. This is comprised of Eco Outdoor limestone pavers. A cluster of candelabra trees stretches up beside timber supports, playing with the available vertical space. Despite looking strikingly similar to a cactus, this plant is actually a succulent tree. A large Murraya hedge provides privacy while the family enjoy the pool.

SOURCE BOOK

Landscape design & construction

Secret Gardens, secretgardens.com.au

Architecture Tulloh Architecture, tulloh.com.au

Builder Sandlik, sandlik.com.au 