

OUTDOORS :

# URBAN SANCTUARY

THIS PRETTY GARDEN IS IN THE HEART OF MELBOURNE,  
YET CLEVER DESIGN AND LUSH PLANTINGS WORK  
TOGETHER TO FASHION A NATURAL ESCAPE

WORDS KYLIE JACKES STYLING WENDY BANNISTER  
PHOTOGRAPHY SHANIA SHEGEDYN







#### BENCH SEAT

Magnolia trees provide a lush green screen across the home's front boundary, where a floating bench seat suspended within a concrete retaining wall makes an inviting seat.

WHEN MELBOURNE couple Anthony and Dominique met with landscaper Sean Dowling of Bayon Gardens, they were happy to share control of their backyard revamp. "I had some definite ideas about the kind of look I wanted to create, and also had help from Sean to ensure that the established trees we wanted to keep fitted nicely into the new design," says Dominique. "Sean's expertise was invaluable and helped ensure everything worked aesthetically and made the most of the space."

In the rebuild, on a modest block in a busy inner city suburb, the landscaping centred on keeping as many of the existing plants as possible, to achieve a natural, low-maintenance, leafy backdrop and complement the couple's new, split-level home. Using the outdoor zone for entertaining, and as a playzone for the couple's son, Emerson, four, was also important.

The biggest challenge was a dramatic level change. "The site for the new home was cut one metre lower than natural ground, so there was a real danger of the backyard feeling disconnected if we were to retain the height with a wall," says landscaper Sean Dowling. The solution was a broad flight of bluestone-clad stairs, which casts the top level of the garden as a central stage to be admired and accessed from the alfresco area below.

Drawing design cues from an existing tall privet and a ficus, a natural unstructured landscape was created. Soft garden beds are layered with a mix of lush tropical plants and grasses, bluestone paving is interwoven with ground cover and stacked stone seating curves around a fire pit (see page 197). "We fire it up when we have parties and it's a real gathering spot to sit around and chat," says Dominique. Another feature is a meditation deck where the couple – who run their own yoga academy – can practise in seclusion. "As we're so busy, it's great to have a quiet place to enjoy a cup of tea or to practise yoga and meditate."

The garden has also attracted a flock of feathery and furry admirers. "We've had a family of rainbow lorikeets move in and we have possums, which is so lovely being so close to the city," says Dominique. "There are trams around the corner, but out the back it's so quiet. It's my retreat."



#### DISPLAY POT

Anthony and Dominique turned an urn from Water Features Direct into a display pot for a cycad (above), surrounded by *aeonium haworthii* (pinwheel) and *senecio barbertonicus* (bush senecio) succulents. "As a focal point it's just as nice with plants," says Dominique. Displays on an opposite boundary are (below, from left) *strelitzia reginae* (birds-of-paradise) and *agave attenuata* (century plants).

#### TIP

If transplanting an established grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*, left), maintaining its roots' integrity is vital. "Cut the top rim and base off the plant's plastic pot, cut oval-shaped holes in the side and keep the tree in the pot when planting it out," says Sean. "This lets the transplant happen without disturbing the roots. Water in, ensuring there are no air pockets around the root ball and that the plant is stable."



"WE'VE BUILT QUITE A *few homes* BUT WE'VE NEVER HAD A PLACE WHERE THE GARDEN FEELS LIKE *such a part* OF THE HOUSE" – DOMINIQUE

#### MEDITATION DECK

Nestled in the back corner of the garden, a timber meditation deck (left) is enveloped by tropical *fatsia japonica* (Japanese aralia), with a towering ficus tree providing shade. Lightweight tub chairs (for similar, try Ikea's 'PS Vågö') provide another vantage spot and are easy to move when Dominique wants to roll out the yoga mat. A lawn was integral to the design so her son, Emerson, could run around and kick a ball. Landscaper Sean Dowling used kikuyu 'Village Green', which tolerates shady areas and has a softer blade than buffalo grass. >





## ALFRESCO AREA

The outdoor living zone features polished concrete floors, a spotted gum ceiling and a flat-top barbecue with custom cabinetry. Lounge chairs (for similar, try Eco Outdoor's 'Nomah' range) and a rug from The Family Love Tree bring style and functionality, while window shutters from European Window Company offer privacy and shade control.



## PAVING

Sawn bluestone pavers from Better Exteriors run up the stairs to the top section, where crazy pavers are seen (below). As the garden is often viewed from the sunken alfresco area, tiered plantings were vital to appreciate the full depth of the backyard.



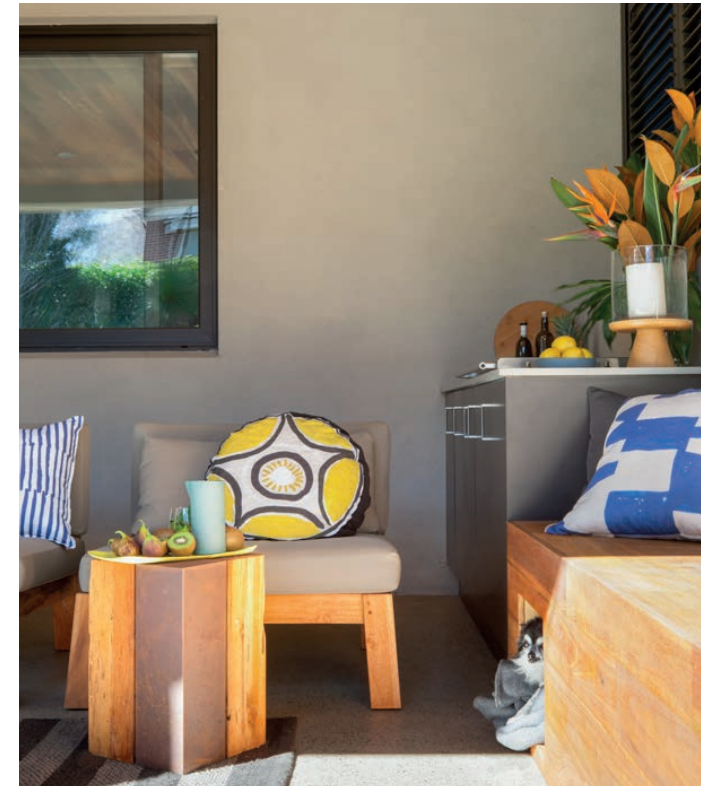
"IT HAS SUCH A *relaxed feel*. THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT AREAS WITHIN THE GARDEN, WE CAN *comfortably* HOST A LOT OF PEOPLE" - DOMINIQUE



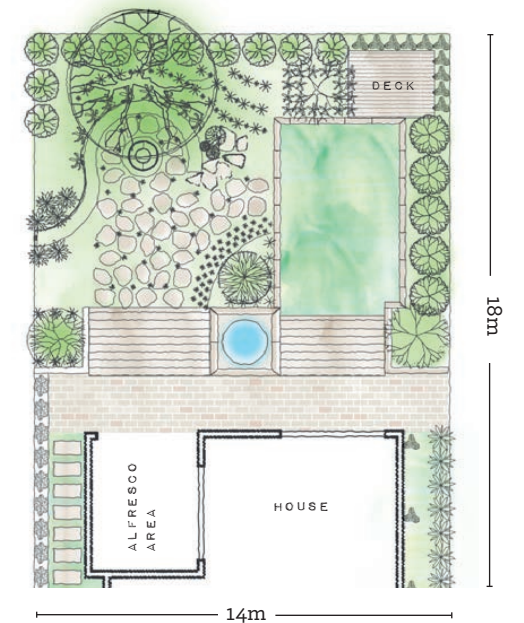
FIRE PIT (THIS PAGE, TOP) FOR SIMILAR, TRY ANGELINA; FROM ROBERT PLUMB, SAGE & CLARE; FRANGO; BLANKET THE FAMILY LOVE TREE

## HIDDEN DOGHOUSE

Shade guarantees the alfresco area remains cool for afternoon siestas in the heat of summer (below). "We spend a lot of time here, and because the kitchen window looks out to this area and the fire pit [left], we enjoy it even when we're inside," says Dominique. Accessorised with cushions from The Family Love Tree and a 'Lotus' teak-and-iron stool from Weylandts, there's even space for Sake the papillon cross, whose doghouse is integrated within a custom timber bench seat. "It was Sean's genius idea," says Dominique. "We didn't want an ugly kennel, and Sean's solution was perfect. Sake loves it."



SOURCE BOOK



LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Sean Dowling, Bayon Gardens, 0448 877 051, bayongardens.com.au.