

peace & party

The owner's brief for designer Steve Warner was for an easy-care garden that's both a peaceful retreat and a party room. She got all that plus 'wow' factor aplenty, and loves it.

words catherine stewart photos brent wilson

Sounds of laughter greet us as we walk through the old terrace house on the way to the little back garden. When we arrive it's easy to see why – owner Clare loves this place and is delighted to share it with us.

Some owners aren't comfortable about bringing in a garden designer to plan and build their gardens, worrying that the result won't really feel like it belongs to them, that it will reflect someone else's personality. And yet Clare is so at home here, it's obvious that a good designer can create something that really is unique, special and personal. Even if you're the best gardener, designing is not easy, and getting a professional in to shape spaces, solve problems, see other ways of doing things and choose suitable materials can make all the difference.

the brief

For a busy professional like Clare, having a haven to come home to at the end of a long day was top of her list. With limited space out the back of her terrace house, the rather daunting brief to designer Steve Warner of Outhouse Design was for a low-maintenance back garden that's a peaceful retreat, a party room, an extension of the nearby dining area, an access path to the rear laneway and a dog-friendly yard all rolled into one. Above all, everyone who visits should look out and say 'wow'. And even

more importantly, all this has to be achieved on a reasonable budget.

concrete start

The original garden, for want of a better description, was a sloping concrete car-parking space, separated from the back lane by an old white roller door, with a bit of garden down one side, decorated with a few desultory pot plants.

The first step was to level the ground plane and make a smooth floor that joins the dining room with the garden. By using decking over the existing concrete surface, Steve could direct drainage away from the house so there was no need for a step as you walk through the sliding glass doors.



BUDGET BENEFITS As removing all the concrete was expensive, Steve chose just to excavate the areas where new garden beds were built. By decking over the top, he could use the fall of the existing slab underneath for easy drainage.



ABOVE: the colour scheme is a clever blend of neutrals, earthy timber tones that blend with the rusty fountain, plus Clare's inspired choice of red cushions. NEAR LEFT: dry stone walling is from Eco Outdoor in the alpine style – www.ecooutdoor.com.au CENTRE LEFT: the owner, Clare, now has the space she wanted; she can take it easy here after work, or invite friends around for a memorable backyard party. OPPOSITE, BELOW: the deck effectively extends the dining room outdoors, without changing levels.

GARDENS CLARE'S PLACE

An empty middle space is great when you've got a lot of guests over for a party, but it makes a garden look smaller, as you just look across the void. To solve that problem, Steve positioned an angled raised bed jutting into the space, clad in strongly textured stone so it's quite eye-catching. The added benefit is a garden bed deep enough to grow a small tree for shade and to provide a protective, spreading canopy.

Raised beds give shape, mass and visual interest at 500mm off the ground, also making the garden feel more furnished and room-like. The colour of the stone blends in with the smooth, rendered walls but adds a kick of strong texture and shadow. With each bed making a convenient sitting ledge, there's no need to have outdoor furniture cluttering up the place.

added privacy

Timber slat screens on the rear and side wall give extra privacy and are stained to echo the warm timber tones of the decking. So Clare would have a special place to sit in her garden and take it easy, there's a handy built-in timber storage box with a back sloped at just the right angle for relaxation at the end of a long day. Brilliant scarlet coloured

cushions are Clare's clever touch to adding to the otherwise quiet neutrals.

focal fountain

Although there are interesting highlights here, none of them overpower the focal point of the bold fountain and patterned, rusting steel screen (made from 3mm Corten steel by Lump Studio, Melbourne, www.lump.com.au). It's the balancing of unity and contrast that make this work so well – the screen is highly patterned and the fountain almost oversized for the space but as they're the same colour as the timber, everything blends through. The screen can be pushed aside for wider access and the rear roller door is painted

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: raised beds planted with *Hebe 'Icing Sugar'* also double as party seating.

FOUNTAIN: its colour blends perfectly with the screen behind and the rich tones of the timber decking.

TRIANGULAR GARDEN BEDS: faced with stone, the raised beds break up the open space and provide a place for the *Cercis* to grow.

IN-BUILT STORAGE: a hinged lid turns this seating into handy storage, a great space-saver in a small garden.



GARDENS CLARE'S PLACE

black, so the screen's pattern is set off and the door recedes into the background. Even the fountain is self-contained and moveable when wider access is required.

evening wows

Lighting transforms this garden from a daytime 'wow' to a night time 'double wow', all ready for a party. A covered fitting in the feature wall casts wonderful shadows across the textured stone, and an elevated light behind the small tree throws beautiful patterns across the timber deck and screen. Knowing that dark is just as important as light in a night garden, Steve has kept pools of shadow to add mystery and change apparent dimensions.

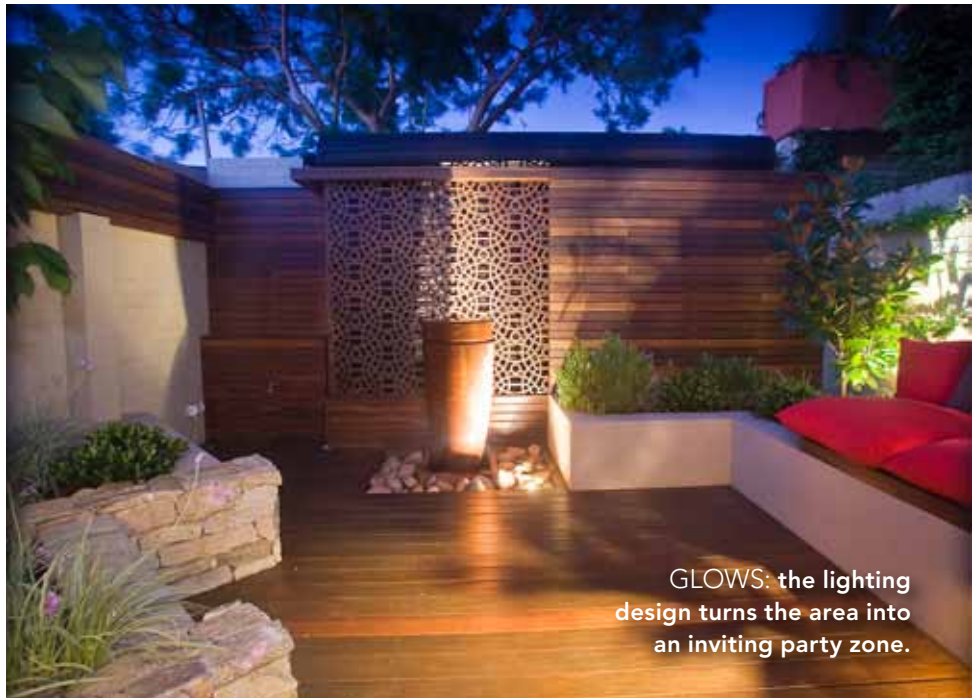
planting plan

With two *Magnolia* 'Little Gem' and a forest pansy, *Cercis* 'Avondale', providing height, the rest of the planting is very simple, with strappy-leaved variegated society garlic, and soft mounds of *Pittosporum* 'Golf Ball' and *Raphiolepis* 'Snow Queen' which will gradually fill the space, but not require lots of pruning. *Hebe* 'Icing Sugar', with its dainty flowering spikes, makes a quick-growing, temporary filler. Bower of beauty (*Pandorea jasminoides*) is a well-behaved climber to train across wires to clothe the side brick fence.

- 1: *Raphiolepis* 'Snow Queen' is a low-growing dwarf variety of hawthorn.
- 2: *Magnolia* 'Little Gem' is a small evergreen tree that will reach 5-8m tall.
- 3: Society garlic (*Thulbagia*) also features variegated, strappy leaves.
- 4: *Pittosporum* 'Golf Ball' is a tidy low-grower forming a mound. BBY

designer details

Designer Steve Warner of Outhouse Design can be contacted at www.outhousedesign.com.au



GLOWS: the lighting design turns the area into an inviting party zone.

