



BESPOKE ENTERTAINER

This outdoor area had its share of challenges before transforming into the stylish living space it is today

Words Kate McKee Photography Katrine Alatl

BELOW It is important to create interest within the garden; taking your eye away from the vertical and to focus more on the horizontal plane.

TOP RIGHT Dwarf Magnolia, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, native violets and *Liriope* 'evergreen giant' was used for the plantings.



RIGHT The existing sandstone paving was cleaned, re-pointed and a protective coating was applied to cope with potential future staining.

Investing in a landscape designer should not be seen as a luxury, but as a smart decision that pays dividends in terms of lifestyle and added value to your property

“While this amazing home would be the envy of most people, the garden certainly wasn’t,” says Steve Warner of OUTHOUSE design who designed the space. “Being only 3.5m wide and 6m long, and enclosed with three-metre high walls, the initial garden felt like a small concrete box.” In summer, the outdoor area was also hot and claustrophobic and in winter it was dank and uninviting — all of which wasn’t very enticing or habitable for the homeowners.

The owners had spent a number of years renovating the home, but when it came to the outside area, the space was overwhelming to them. They commissioned OUTHOUSE design after seeing their portfolio of gardens and were also aware that they had recently won the prestigious National AILDM design competition for best residential design. The brief was simple. The owners wanted an outside space that was inviting. It needed to be timeless and to also have a relationship with the house, but retain its own personality.

The garden design was to be simple in layout and take advantage of the existing structures. “At the end of the day, if you can work with the landscape rather than fight it, it traditionally delivers a cost effective and cohesive design,” says Steve.

The main goal for the space was to create a feeling of balance and calm by keeping the materials simple and drawing focus to certain elements as opposed to others. Two initial challenges they faced were the confronting height of the boundary walls

and the lack of planting opportunity. “A feature wall at the back of the garden was the obvious solution, but the last thing you want to do is create too much of a feature by overwhelming the space and reinforcing the feeling of enclosure,” says Steve.

The solution was timber as the natural material paired with the warm tones of the sandstone pavers creates a calm cohesion. The inclusion of fixed rust panels, created at three different depths and randomly placed across the wall, provides a subtle change. At night when the back wall is up lit, personality of the wall is transformed and forms a visual connection to the home.

As with all small gardens, utilising all available space is key. The installation of the fixed bench seating saves space, and is supported by the new wall constructed for access steps to the rear lane. “The long part of the seat was kept storage-free, as this allows us to light up the seating area and create the feel that the garden is wider than it is,” adds Steve.

With restricted planting opportunities, two solutions were needed. The first was a vertical garden that softened the main wall which also doubles as a feature when viewed from the seating area and the house. “The garden is a flexible system that is low maintenance and allows the client to change the planting as and when needed,” says Steve. “In summer, he grows produce and herbs to use on the barbecue, and in winter a mix of key shrubs.”

The second solution was to build a narrow garden bed that would soften the base of the main wall, but more importantly allow for planting on the face of the wall. By arranging the wire vertically and then horizontally, it breaks up the wall

and distracts the eye from the height of the boundary. Light coloured paving was used and also laid horizontally rather than vertically in order to create that extra sense of width, which is vital in a narrow garden such as this one.

Simple but effective planting was key to the overall design. The main garden bed features dwarf magnolias, which gives an abundance of scent. The underside of the leaves is a distinctive rust colour, which complements the timber seating, sandstone and feature wall. “The mass native violets are an excellent low-maintenance groundcover and weed suppressant,” comments Steve. “Most of all they look fantastic as a carpet of purple and white.” *Liriope* ‘evergreen giant’ was also used as it is a solid foundation plant, as was jasmine as it is a reliable performer in all sorts of conditions.

Steve is particularly proud of this garden as it was a difficult space to tackle and the clients are now using their outdoor space as an everyday part of living. “They invested a lot of money into the development of their home and had the vision necessary to afford the same care, investment and opportunity for their garden.” Investing in a landscape designer should not be seen as a luxury, but as a smart decision that pays dividends in terms of lifestyle and added value to your property — as can be seen from the beautiful images on these pages. 🌿

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