

Surprise plot twists

Home owners are looking beyond the plain old garden-variety backyard, writes **Stephen Lacey**.

Not too long ago, the backyard was a utilitarian space with a Hills Hoist, lemon tree and sometimes even a dunny. The most that ever happened "out there" was a game of cricket.

Nowadays, as people transform the space to suit their lifestyles and interests, backyards are increasingly diverse.

All Decked Out

Clare Button has a reputation as a fantastic host but the bland concrete slab she inherited at the back of her Leichhardt terrace was not much of an entertainment space.

The advertising finance director asked Steve Warner from Outhouse Design to transform the area.

"I wanted the space to become an extension of my dining room," she says.

The job had its challenges. "I only had a tiny inner-city courtyard to work with," Warner says.

"But the results prove you don't need a million-dollar budget or a big area to create something really special."

The existing slab became the foundation for a deck of merbau. Warner ran the timber in the same direction and at the same level as the interior floorboards, creating a seamless transition. The courtyard walls were rendered and painted, then softened with a scented pandorea climber trailing along stainless steel wires. Built-in bench seats provide a place for guests to relax with a drink.

Warner painted the old garage roller door black and covered it with a patterned steel screen that can be slid out of the way. The water feature can be taken away to make extra room when required.

Whenever Button has a party, guests spill into the courtyard from the eight-seater dining table. "I had 15 girls over last weekend for canapes, cocktails and gossip," she says. I love my garden.

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