



Design idea

When redesigning a small outdoor area, introduce built-in features such as barbecues and bench seating to maximise the space you have.



BEFORE

ABOVE The built-in barbecue and timber bench seat keep the space clean and uncluttered.

WORDS: Rachel Falzon
PHOTOS: Peter Brennan

With a crisp, clean design, the home needed a sophisticated outdoor area to match. According to Steve Warner of Outhouse Design, who was called in to transform the existing dull and lifeless courtyard, "The owners wanted something different – a garden that grabs attention as soon as you walk in the front door."

The shape of the garden presented some challenges, as did the high white boundary wall and exposed location, which proved a recipe for extreme heat in summer. "The homeowner also had an existing water feature that was overpowering for the space, but to be more cost-efficient and eco-friendly we worked to recycle this feature into the new design," explains Steve.

While the revamped water feature is a focal point, the key element of the new design is the curved planter. "The beauty of this is that it creates visual interest from the home, introduces contrast and maximises the planting area," says Steve. It also makes the space seem more open.

The planter features a pair of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy', a vase-shaped small tree offering year-round interest. "In spring, the large, heart-shaped leaves turn a brilliant, eye-catching shade of reddish-purple with a velvety-satin appearance," says Steve. "And



masses of small, pink flowers are borne among the branches."

The trees are part of a mixed planting scheme that softens the view to the water feature and includes *Agave attenuata*, *Liriope muscari*, *Hebe hulkana*, *Viola hederacea* and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, which is espaliered along the back wall.

When working in a small space, good lighting design is essential. "We selected an LED strip light to create subtle shadow lighting under the timber bench seat," explains Steve. This creates the illusion of the bench floating above the deck

and makes the area seem deeper than it actually is. Other clever lighting elements include in-ground LED lights in the low wall (these are set flush with the decking) and uplighting to the water feature and the Forest Pansy trees.

Savvy features make this petite space practical as well as good-looking. There's a sleek built-in barbecue and the low walls are ideal for casual seating. A floating timber seat is the perfect place for the owner to recline, relax and read a book while the curve of the wall creates enough room for a cosy dining setting – just the place for a mid-week drink or brunch for two. ■



TOP Colourful *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' feature trees flank the water feature.

ABOVE LEFT The gently curving white wall adds visual interest when looking out from the home.

ABOVE RIGHT The existing water feature was given a modern makeover and is now a focal point.

Petite retreat

This courtyard proves good things really do come in small packages