

There's just something so different about the air in the Blue Mountains — so cool and fresh.

Blue Mountains beauty

A formal yet relaxed garden and outdoor room offer a superb connection to the surrounding bushland while also meeting stringent bushfire-zone building requirements



Strong, clean vistas have been created from each internal room and connect with the external landscape.



Green, serene and beautiful.

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When it comes to natural Australian beauty, it's difficult to surpass the world-renowned Blue Mountains region of New South Wales. "Borrowing from this amazing landscape was a pleasure," says designer Steve Warner of OUTHOUSE design, who created this garden and outdoor room in Blaxland, a charming town in the lower Blue Mountains.

But along with this beautiful location came certain challenges. "A vital component of the design process was following the strict set guidelines that are in place for designing within a bushfire-prone area," says Steve. "We had to design a garden that visually connects with the bushland but still achieves the required policy controls in a bushfire-prone area."

The client purchased their land as a clear block. It was originally part of a larger parcel of land and, quite surprisingly, was a private light aircraft runway. Home designer Daniel Briffa from Adan Creative Design describes the home built on this land as "modern contemporary". With that in mind, it was important to balance the external and internal spaces and create strong, clean vistas from each internal room and connect with the external landscape.

The garden acts as an extension of the home — it's formal, yet relaxed and low maintenance. It takes advantage of the natural grade changes to offer a number of outdoor rooms while providing a strong connection across the site. "The landscape level change is embraced by both the building and soft landscape, and every room delivers a visual connection to the borrowed landscape," says Steve.

The external areas are subtly divided into



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The swimming pool cabana acts as separate accommodation for weekend drop-ins by family and friends and also as an extension to the pool area for sunny afternoons.



ABOVE All retaining walls are built of masonry and have a smooth render finish. The walls complement the home while not impeding the surrounding views. **OPPOSITE** The landscape visually connects with the natural bushland but still achieves the tough policy controls that are mandated in bushfire-prone areas.

rooms, with the expanse of lawn acting as a seamless connection. "The entrance is more formal, with strong visual planting lines directing guests to the front entrance, whereas the open aspect facing the bushland views lends itself well to the pool zone and family cabana area," continues Steve.

"The swimming pool cabana acts very much as separate accommodation for weekend drop-ins by extended family and friends and also as an extension to the pool area for those lazy, sunny Sunday afternoons with a gin and tonic. I love the lower pool zone and the way that the landscape levels draw your eye to the natural landscape."

Plants were selected with low-maintenance in mind and preference was given to natives that

would need no ongoing water support. A drip irrigation system was installed to establish the planting and, if required, water the plants in the future. To the rear of the property, production areas were created that are supported by the use of water captured from the property's roof.

"The key focus for us is a sustainable landscape so, when possible, native planting was used," says Steve. Key trees planted include *Elaeocarpus reticulatus* 'Prima Donna', chosen for its hardy nature and pink flowers, as well as *Syzygium australe*. For hedge planting, *Acmena smithii* features for a strong, low-maintenance hedge, as does *Buxus microphylla*. For shrubs, *Anigozanthos* 'Amber Velvet', *Agave attenuata*, *Lomandra longifolia* and *Dianella caerulea* were planted. OUTHOUSE design also incorporated *Themeda australis*, *Kennedia prostrata* and *Scaevola hookeri* for grass planting and groundcovers.

"The landscape enjoys the benefits of low-maintenance planting, yet delivers strong

architectural form with the mass flowering of the red *Anigozanthos* and *Agave attenuata*," says Steve.

All retaining walls are masonry with a smooth render finish. "The retaining walls complement the home while not impeding the views," explains Steve. Stencil-coloured concrete features were included on the driveway and main entrance pathway, while large-format paving was employed for the lower garden terrace and pool surrounds.

"It's a stunning home in an amazing location and is a great case of less-is-more design," says Steve. "It's a unique example of when a designer works in a collaborative manner with client and architect. We designed the garden on site rather than behind the drawing desk and became hands-on with the client in all aspects, from the plant ordering, on-site install and ongoing relationship with the space. With our client being very hands-on and taking on the majority of the project management, it was a pleasure to work in collaboration with both parties."

