



INNER-CITY OASIS

Carved into distinct yet seamlessly connected spaces, this intimate and verdant courtyard is a place for relaxing and entertaining



When looking at this concrete, narrow courtyard you’d assume there wouldn’t be space to rest and rejuvenate. However, this inner-city garden is far from tiny. Featuring a modern dining area, raised deck, outdoor shower and deluxe sunken spa, this modern city oasis certainly packs a punch.

To create this chic entertaining space, OUTHOUSE design set out to encourage a green connection and flow from the indoors out, while also reflecting the vibrancy and edginess of the surrounding city. “Our design-savvy clients love the inner-city vibe of Woolloomooloo and had recently purchased a spacious ground-floor apartment,” say Steve Warner and Carina Bronte of OUTHOUSE design.

“With its clean lines, strong design sense and semi-brutalist concrete feel, the apartment has a real strength of character. The proposed courtyard garden needed to be exceptional in its level of quality finishes, as well as delivering a sense of connection and gravitas.”

As the clients like to entertain, the OUTHOUSE design team, along with Urban Garden Enrichment, played with different garden levels to create fun and interest and encourage conversation, but were also strategic with their planting to create more intimate spaces. The rear doors of the apartment open to create a clean connection with the outdoors, so the dining and entertainment space was placed here, with the timber day bed and day spa set towards the back of the garden to enjoy on those sun-drenched days.

Photography: Katrine Mardini



“The major challenge with the design was the location and installation of the clients’ spa bath, as this is an extremely tight space with no depth to play with. Every inch had to be utilised,” says Steve. “The garden needed to be elevated above the services to ensure access to them could be maintained. As this is on a slab garden, every aspect had to be calculated by the project engineer to take live loading into account.”

The clean line of the barbecue benchtop flows elegantly into the organic seating, which was made using a lightweight form of glass-fibre-reinforced concrete (GFRC). This line cleverly draws your eye from within

the apartment out to the side of the garden, creating a smooth, curved connection that combines the casual dining space with the relaxed seating zone.

All timber used for the project is sustainable accoya, which has gold-level Cradle to Cradle (C2C) certification and a low-carbon footprint. Decking was chosen to allow services connection and access to the spa and the drainage connection. Any pavers that were used were retained, cleaned and re-laid, along with some additional matching pavers for the step-stone connecting bridge.

A screen of planted palms softens the bold concrete walls and includes *Plumeria*



acutifolia and *Cyathea cooperi*. There are also some other key plantings: *Rhapis excelsa*, *Liriope muscari* ‘Just Right’ and *Philodendron* ‘Xanadu’ as well as wall-mounted planters with *Rhipsalis baccifera*, *Crassula aborescens* ‘Max Cook’ and *Sansevieria trifasciata*.

“When plant selection is made under the strict rules of right plant, right place, the long-term maintenance is minimal to zero,” says Carina. “This garden has a number of microclimates, from full shade to full sun, so planting has been selected to suit each zone, making this a sustainable space.”

On the other side of the garden, climber *Stephanotis floribunda* drapes softly down the concrete, while *Ajuga reptans* ‘Catlins Giant’ and *Viola banksii* provide gentle, subtle ground coverage below.

“It’s the simplicity of the garden that I really like,” says Steve. “It still has a strong boldness about it, while being soft and engaging in its shape. The curved barbecue combined seat is a unique piece of sculpture and a visual link that unifies the space.”

In 2021, this remarkable small-space project won the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers and Managers’ National Gold Award – Residential Landscape Design. In the same year it won both The Landscape Association’s Gold Award and Best in Category – Residential Construction.

more info?
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