

FEATURE

RACHELLE UNREICH



THE MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW (ABOVE). A THREE-STORY VERTICAL GARDEN IN THE S&B ITALIAN COURTYARD FEATURING OUTDOOR COLLECTIONS BY PATRICIA LIQUORIOLA (BELOW). PICTURE: MARK AGI-WANASY



Showing off the outdoor sanctuary

WE THINK OF OUR GARDENS AS ROOMS, THE SAME WAY WE THINK OF THE ROOMS IN OUR HOMES.

The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship," said Ralph Waldo Emerson. And, perhaps the happiest home owner is he who learns from nature the lesson of all fresco areas. The humble Australian backyard — think Hills Hoist, a barbecue, and a patch of grass for a cricket pitch — has now become the centrepiece of many upmarket homes.

It's not merely a local trend: in Los Angeles-based celebrity interior designer Martyr Lawrence-Bullard's new book, *Live, Love and Decorate*, scores of properties have used the outdoors as another "room" to showcase, complete with pool houses furnished with televisions, plush furniture and fireplaces. In screenwriter Aaron Sorkin's Bullard-decorated home, the outdoor sofa and ottoman looks as if it has been borrowed from the living room, covered in faux leather and sat underneath a stag's head made from fibreglass and steel. If this is suburbia, it sure doesn't look like it.

Some of Melbourne's residential gardens also reveal a left-of-centre approach. One project by architect firm Jackson Clements Burrows, Seaview Avenue, has an indoor-outdoor room that provides a place for shade in summer, and a room that can be closed up in winter. Made from polycarbonate, it's a translucent "box" that attaches to the house, lined internally with timber battens.

"The outdoor room is everywhere at the moment," says one of the firm's directors, Jon Clements. "The way we look at it, it's a flexible space that might benefit

from solar warmth and be closed in the winter, and then opened in summer — an annex."

For Myles Broad, principal designer with Eckersley Garden Architecture, the idea of creating the best all fresco space is about "thinking of a courtyard or rear garden or backyard as a living space. We're looking at how we can be comfortable all year round in these places, whether it's through heating or lighting or outdoor kitchens. The trend is that people are putting more money and resources into the places where they spend a lot of time."

A space must be practical: "If you pull open the cupboard into your outdoor kitchen and it's covered in spiderwebs, you're not going to use it. It's about creating comfort in those spaces, and then making them special, so you'd want to go there rather than out to a restaurant."

Rather than seeing the house as a "big block", Broad prefers to look at it "like Tetris blocks, with holes here and there. You can then have niches and open up pockets of the house to the outside that can provide shelter and sanctuary." Aesthetic appeal, obviously, is an important factor: "You can have contrast — a timber floor and pavement — or something that is seamless, like a timber floor and timber deck. There are no hard and fast rules, but there needs to be harmony between indoors and outdoors."

Broad is also aware of the other touches that can turn an outside area into a showpiece: "Planting design is probably something people fall down on a lot. The trend used to be that everyone put down a purple wall at the back and planted a



few yuccas. What they missed is the idea of mood; you need to create a garden that develops in that space over time. Look for things that create a seasonal change, as well as a flower like gardenia for beautiful scent. Consider what things will attract birds, or give dappled shade in the summer, and offer a moody, tranquil space in winter." Swimming pools are no longer practical additions alone: "Fifty per cent of our clients are putting them in and it

becomes the feature of the garden." Artwork, too, can give the space a lift. "A stylish sculpture or something unique adds a personal touch."

And, says interior decorator and blogger Shannon Pricke, the key is to "treat your all fresco spaces with the same attention to detail as your interior spaces, with a combination of decoration, comfort and functionality. Create 'rooms' through architectural fixtures — walls or trellises



A MYLES BROAD GARDEN (LEFT), THE SEAVIEW AVENUE HOUSE BY JACKSON CLEMENTS BURROWS (ABOVE), OUTDOOR SEATING IN MARTYR LAWRENCE-BULLARD'S BOOK *LIVE, LOVE AND DECORATE*. PICTURES: F1 MIMS, SHANNON MCGAETH



— or through the use of planting, either landscaped or in pots. Always design from the top of the space to the bottom — outdoor lighting or overhanging pendants can have impressive impact.

"Your outdoor furniture should reflect your outdoor activities: sofa and armchairs for lying and hanging out, or dining tables and chairs for entertaining. Just as you would not put an oversized sofa in a small room, don't put an over-

sized daybed in a small courtyard. The key is balance." Her favourite outdoor ranges? "Patricia Liquoriola's Canasta collection from Space Furniture or the Driadre range by Peter Emrys-Roberts."

In the end, says Lawrence-Bullard, it's about "making the space luxurious. Treat the outdoor space as an indoor space that has a direct flow from indoors, and draw from some of that colour palette." Above all, enjoy it.

Top of the garden

For real-life inspiration, the Melbourne International Flower & Garden show runs for five days from this Wednesday until Sunday, April 1. It features landscape and floral exhibits, new products and innovative ways to utilise a garden. Here are the five garden designers you shouldn't miss:

MARNIE LEWIS

You probably won't design your garden to resemble a Norwegian forest, the way Ms Lewis has, with its white quartz pebbles emulating a snow-covered ground, as well as a lounge, dining area, chimney (complete with resin moose head) and large bath. Still, it's worth noting that themed areas can be beautiful and give a garden the element of surprise, as seen through her white painted brick surfaces and timber cladding.

ADELINÉ DOTCHIN

For family homes, all fresco areas need to double as outdoor playrooms. Who better to advise than a 13-year-old, who has designed a garden for children (with the help of her mother, 2010 garden show bronze medal winner Ross McCully)? In Adeliné's garden, there's a bamboo tunnel leading into a children's play area, with a slight *Alice in Wonderland* theme.

NATASHA HASTINGS: My Flowerhouse

Although Ms Hastings hasn't constructed a landscaped area, this florist has a suspension garden on display, where she'll be conducting free workshops. Best for those who want ideas on how to make their garden beautifully decorative.

DANIEL PIPER

Effectively blending old with new, Mr Piper's modern garden uses locally sourced Grampian sandstone, combining the hard accents with soft plantings. Expect a rock water feature and large floating stone terrace steps leading to a lush lawn. The sustainable features in the garden will appeal to the water-wise.

PAAL ORAMT

This garden is designed by Mr Grant, especially as a spot to talk and break bread — an outdoor area away from the invasion of media and technology. The curving lines and spirals are inspired by nature; focal points include a conversation pit, fire ball and relaxation spa.

RACHELLE UNREICH

CONTACT US

Editor
Miranda 721
miry@theage.com.au
8667 3093

Editorial inquiries
domain@theage.com.au
8667 2576

Advertising
Matthew Masayuki
8667 4195
domain.com.au
1300 795 129

Market wrap
Chris Wedelago
cvedelago@theage.com.au
8667 2647

Auction action
Chris Tallhurst
Saturday 1pm-5pm
8667 2647