

DESIGN LANDSCAPES

Rhapsody in green

A well-planned garden connects the architecture of a home with its surrounds, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

A garden can elevate a house several notches, transforming even the most severe buildings into something considerably more. While a few shrubs can soften an entrance, the larger ideas conceived by designers linger well after the front door is closed. And while some landscape plans emerge from a drawing board, others, such as Bellemo + Cat's own garden, happened by chance.

"We didn't really have a clear idea of what our front garden was going to look like. The few images in our minds were of the Grampian Ranges, the bush walk we just returned from," says architect Michael Bellemo, who lives in his Northcote house in Melbourne with his life and business partner, artist Cat Macleod, and their two children.

Bellemo and Macleod's 1960s' house featured a concreted front garden, as severe as the brick home.

"Cat and I were breaking up the concrete with a jackhammer. The piles of concrete looked quite sculptural, resembling shifting plates in the earth's crust," says Bellemo, who, with Macleod, created four stacks, varying in height from half a metre to just over a metre.

Rather than putting these "shards" in a skip, they were skilfully arranged. The stacks were perceived as a mountain range, with mallee eucalypts dotted between. To soften the design, a native daisy, sporting a yellow flower (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), along with textured ground cover (*Casuarina glauca prostrate*) completes the composition.

The Northcote house also features a native garden at the rear, including a couple of established eucalypts. Part of the renovation to the home is a large picture window to the rear that frames these trees, as well as allowing northern light to penetrate.

"We saw the garden and house as inseparable. There's a dialogue between the two," says Bellemo, who prefers a more abstract-style garden with segments of colour and texture rather than formal arrangements. "Cat and I also prefer native gardens to attract birdlife."

Landscape architect Jane Irwin also included numerous native plants for a new house designed by Hill Thalys Architecture. The backdrop to this house in Shoalhaven, on the NSW South Coast, is Berry Mountain.

"It's quite a dramatic escarpment that required anchoring the split-level house to the landscape and connecting it to the



broader landscape," says Irwin, director of Jane Irwin Landscape Architecture. "We worked closely with the architects as they were designing the house, including material selections."

Irwin selected a variety of plants, combining indigenous species with exotic plants. Native geraniums are combined with annuals in deep pinks and blues. Further away from the house, she used a variety of native grasses. Recycled bluestone edges the driveway as well as responding to the contours of the steep site.

"For each design, I endeavour to work with, rather than against, the natural systems of the property. Each site has its own unique characteristics well before we arrive," says Irwin, who was conscious of making the house feel part of the landscape rather than an adjunct to it.

Eckersley Garden Architecture is also known for its ability to respond to architecture, whether it's a free-standing detached home, or an inner-city warehouse, as in this case, designed by NMBW Architecture. Located in South Yarra,



Left and top right: indigenous and exotic plants frame this Shoalhaven house. Above left and right: vertical planters at the South Yarra warehouse and concrete stacks in Michael Bellemo and Cat Macleod's garden.

Melbourne, the warehouse, spread over four levels, suffered from not having any soil in which to plant. The other concern was the warehouse's southern orientation, affording insufficient natural light.

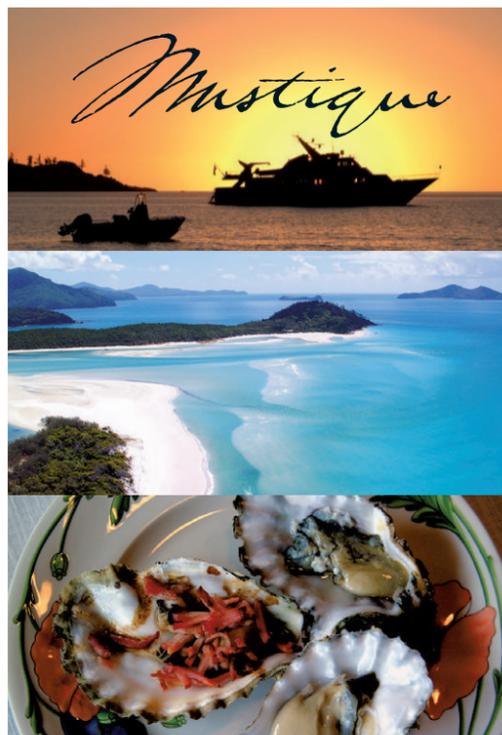
The brief to Eckersley Garden Architecture was for verdant outlooks.

"We found the best solution to be vertical planters, stackable and available in modules," says Scott Leung, co-director of the practice.

These planters feature philodendrons and a variety of spider plants. There's also wandering jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) in the mix, as well as ivy.

The South Yarra warehouse, now a home, includes a rooftop garden with maiden grass (reaching 1.5 metres) planted en masse to create privacy from neighbours.

"When you sit around the table [on the rooftop], you're completely enclosed," says Leung, who also planted ornamental grapes and silver-veined climbing plants on the balustrades to further create a private enclosure. "The green walls also create an important thermal quality in cooling the house during the warmer months." **L&L**



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