

# GARDENS

*A recent reimagining of this garden pays homage to its historic roots.*

A pebble-and-bluestone 'floor' defines the seating area in the grounds of this 1850s Melbourne property. "We designed it as an 'outdoor rug'," says landscape designer Scott Leung. In the background are stunning blue-purple spikes of *Echium candicans* (Pride of Madeira), while pretty *Heliotropium arborescens* 'Lord Roberts' and yellow iris spill over the ground. Turn the page for more...





# Timeless BEAUTY

Layers of foliage plants and strong, classic notes have shaped a garden that honours history and offers sanctuary from modern life.

STORY *Elizabeth Wilson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Claire Takacs*



A pair of cone-shaped English box plants stand at the entrance to the pool. Here, burgundy-toned *Berberis* 'Little Favourite' is mixed with lime-green *Raphiolepis intermedia*, while further behind, with copper-toned tips, are upright rows of *Nandina domestica* (sacred bamboo). The path is made from slate pavers edged with mini mondo grass. On the other side of the pool is the wisteria walk. Mature trees (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) provide a pretty canopy. ►





#### FEATURE PLANTS

*Liriope muscari*  
'Royal Purple'

*Berberis* 'Little Favourite'  
(Dwarf barberry)

*Hydrangea quercifolia*  
(Oakleaf hydrangea)

*Buxus sempervirens*  
(English box)

*Ligustrum vulgare* 'Buxifolium'  
(European privet)

*Camellia sasanqua* 'Setsugekka'

*Wisteria floribunda* 'Alba'

#### H&G GARDEN



When Bronwyn Cathels and Stewart Anderson moved into their stately, 1850s bluestone home in the Melbourne suburb of Kew, one of their top priorities was creating a garden befitting its provenance. "When we bought the property, it had a picket fence that was falling over," says Bronwyn. "The previous owners had made plans for the garden but hadn't completed them. We wanted to create a country oasis 5km from the city because, historically, that's what it was."

The property was originally owned by Sir William Stawell, Victoria's first attorney-general and, later, chief justice. Designed in the Italianate style, the home originally sat on 13ha (32 acres) and Sir William reportedly enjoyed life here as a country gentleman, establishing vegetable gardens, orchards and a dairy. In the 1880s, the estate was subdivided and the home changed hands many times before Bronwyn and Stewart purchased it in 2005. By that stage the property was 2750m<sup>2</sup>, comprising a

50x12m front garden, a 26x22m rear garden with a pool, and a large side garden of 24x8m, featuring a pond.

Bronwyn and Stewart enlisted landscape designer Rick Eckersley to revive the garden. They came to him armed with research, revealing a link to one of Australia's most revered landscapers. "In the 1920s, there had been an Edna Walling garden here, although there was no sign of it by the time we arrived," says Bronwyn. Their brief was to recapture the magic of that era with a garden that would complement the house.

Working alongside Rick were Scott Leung and Myles Broad, now principal designers at Eckersley Garden Architecture. In this garden they wanted to create strong structure and form, with a focus on abundant, layered foliage rather than showy floral displays. "If you want a timeless look, you have to be understated," says Scott. "Subtlety is what makes it so beautiful."

To provide the all-important structural plantings, the Eckersley team planted clusters of trees (crepe myrtle and lace leaf

**ABOVE** The wisteria walk was designed to link the front and back gardens. "It frames and balances the garden," says Scott, "and forms a beautiful backdrop for the pool area." It's white Japanese wisteria, *Wisteria floribunda* 'Alba', which has longer tassels than Chinese wisteria. **OPPOSITE** clockwise from top left: Bronwyn and black labrador Annie sitting at a favourite spot next to the pool. Crab apple tree in flower. Purple spikes of *Echinops candicans*. Slender trunks of Crepe myrtle trees (*Lagerstroemia indica*) underplanted with *Limnium perezii* (purple statice) and *Iris sibirica*. Bright pink flowers of *Eupatorium megalophyllum* (mist flower). Virginia creeper climbs over a barrel-shaped pergola while the 'outdoor rug' made from pavers and pebbles is underneath; the strappy foliage at left is *Beschermeria yuccoides* (Mexican fire lily) and on the right is *Acer palmatum* 'Dissectum Seiryu' (Lace leaf maple). The flower of Mexican fire lily.





maples) and established hedges (box leaf privet and *Michelia yunnanensis*). Along the southern boundary, they put in a row of puriri trees (*Vitex lucens*) to screen neighbours and form an evergreen backdrop. These all blend harmoniously with the older trees on the site, including some bull bays (*Magnolia grandiflora*), honey locusts (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), weeping lilly pillis (*Waterhousea floribunda*) and a couple of blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) that possibly date back to Sir William's time.

The structural plantings are complemented by lush, textured layers. In the lower storey, the key plant is *Liriope muscari* 'Royal Purple', its flowers creating a sea of violet from late summer to autumn. Also on this level are perennials such as irises, hellebores, red-hot pokers (*Kniphofia*) and anemones, all providing seasonal colour. The taller layer features mid-storey shrubs, including hydrangeas and sweet viburnum (*Viburnum odoratissimum*).

In tandem with the larger themes of the design, Bronwyn wanted to include a picking garden featuring roses so she can always have flowers for display inside the house. The roses that were chosen are all strong shades of red, including six bushes each of 'Mr Lincoln', 'Francois Rabelais', 'Tradescant', 'Red Cross', 'Papa Meilland' and 'Sir Donald Bradman'. They are underplanted with dwarf *Gardenia radicans* and jonquil bulbs.

*'We're close to the city  
yet it's quiet, private,  
beautiful and relaxing.'*

Bronwyn Cathels

A vegetable garden was another priority for Bronwyn. "I've had one since I was in single digits, so having one here was a must," she says. "Other members of the family wanted a tennis court, but I said no, that's the spot for my vegie garden." Measuring 16x6m, the vegetable plot is indeed almost the size of a tennis court. Eight 2x6m beds, enclosed by hedges of European privet (*Ligustrum vulgare* 'Buxifolium'), bulge with seasonal produce. It's very much Bronwyn's domain. "I'm there most weekends, tending whatever's in season: broad beans, heirloom tomatoes and beetroot, herbs, brassicas, fennel, carrots and kale."

At some stage a previous owner planted a row of white-flowering wisteria plants. Scott has formalised this by building an arbour, which is now wrapped in thick, snaking vines and drips with pendant-like flowers in spring. "The wisteria walk is a beautiful colonnade stretching from the house into the garden," says Scott. Elsewhere, pergolas, paths and seating help create a multi-dimensional landscape of outdoor rooms. "There is always somewhere 'right' to sit, whatever the occasion or the weather," says Bronwyn. "I especially love sitting around the pond; it's a lovely place to just be. That's where I solve the problems of the world." **H&G**  
*Eckersley Garden Architecture, Richmond, Victoria;*  
(03) 9413 3223 or [e-ga.com.au](http://e-ga.com.au).

Symmetry and a mirror-surfaced pond are the key elements in the side garden. Masses of *Liriope muscari* 'Royal Purple' form a lush, cushioned low-level ground cover, while a row of *Elettaria cardamomum* (true cardamom) combine in a fragrant hedge. The big glossy leaves of *Magnolia* 'Little Gem' add texture. **OPPOSITE** Bronwyn's vegetable garden is always brimming with seasonal produce. The garden beds are framed with a combination of buxus, rosemary and privet. The clipped perimeter hedge is European privet; beyond that is a white camellia hedge.

