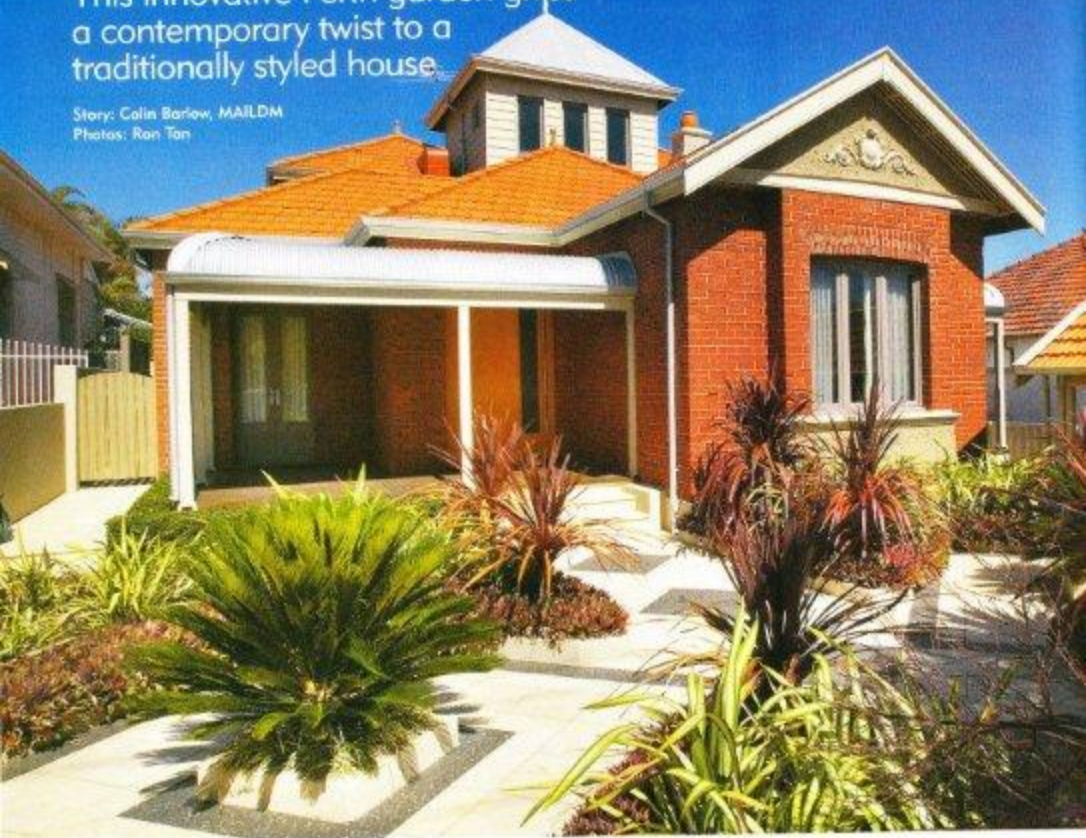


A modern shift

This innovative Perth garden gives a contemporary twist to a traditionally styled house.

Story: Colin Barlow, MAILDM

Photos: Ron Tan



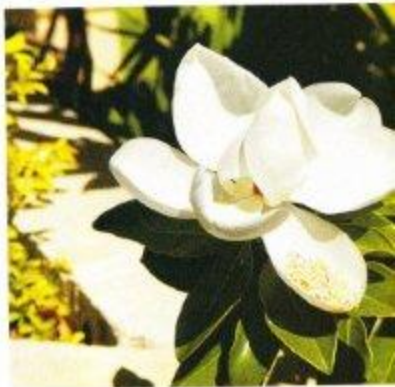
As I arrived on-site, my immediate thoughts were to design a timeless rose garden with clipped formal hedges to complement the traditional architecture of the house. However, these thoughts quickly vanished once I met the owners, a professional couple with a young daughter, and ventured into their beautifully renovated but very contemporary home. This couple obviously wanted something quite different and were willing to create a high-impact, modern garden that made practical use of the outdoors.

I also noticed there was no clear entrance to the house as the existing, partially completed fence impeded easy entry to the front door, so this would need to be addressed, too.

As I ventured out the back, it was like something out of your worst horror story with overgrown trees, huge piles of wood, debris and old carpets strewn all over the banks in what seemed like an attempt to stabilise the sloping block. Here, the owners requested a garden that was able to cater for such diverse functions as entertaining large groups of people, playing a game of cricket and providing a safe and stimulating child-friendly environment.

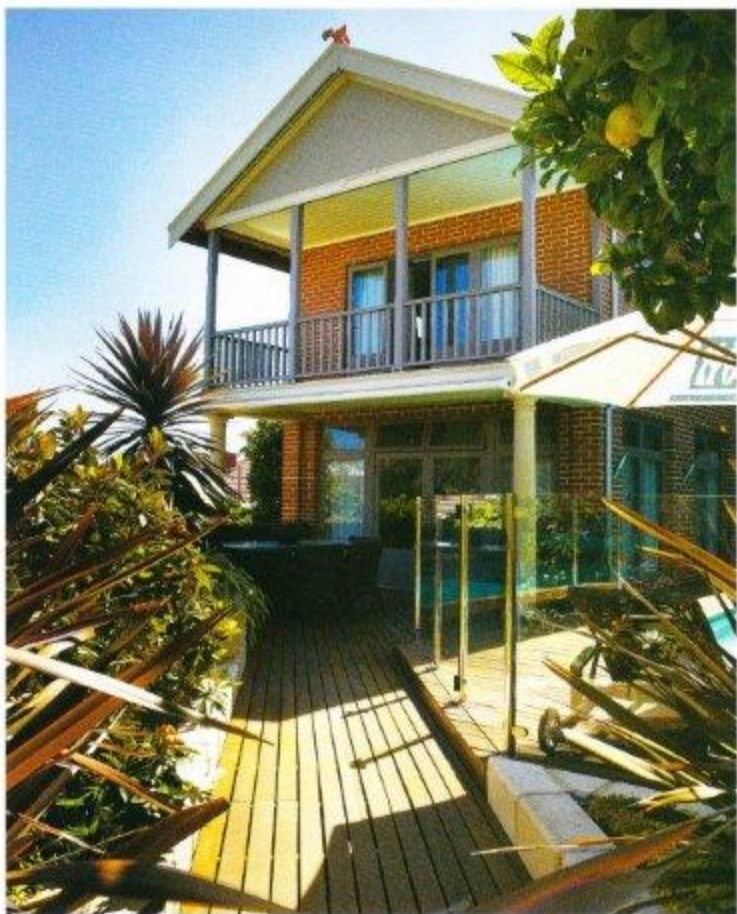
The garden also had to be easy to maintain, water-wise and a little different from the norm while incorporating a workshop, carport, water feature, children's play area and screening of the existing ugly fibre cement fencing.

The owners had seen a metal fence





with squares they liked for the front
and this, along with the angle of the
pitch, became my inspiration for the front
design. These squares were rotated to
the diamond outline for the raised garden
and paving inserts — a contemporary twist
on conventional, formal garden.
A section was cut out of the front wall to
open the front entry and regain a sense of
light and grandeur. Two new piers were
added to match the existing piers at the entry
to the carport and a rendered wall was built
within the sloping garden to the left of
the carport. To allow for the later
installation of an electric fence, the front
section of the wall was positioned further back.
Intriguing Midland Style/one Seaspray
Midnight Sky Terrazzo paving was used
to punctuate the square diamond patterns of →



garden profile



the garden beds. These were edged with the purple Moses-in-a-cradle (*Rhoeo discolor*) with the variegated *Phormium* 'Yellow Wave' behind and *Cordyline* 'Red Chocolate' used to accent the entry and exit points of the garden. Central diamond beds were highlighted with plantings of sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*) underplanted with *Ariape*. A low hedge of lilly pilly borders the existing deck at the front entry while a hedge of *Magnolia* 'Little Gem' underplanted with variegated *dianella* screen the neighbours to the side of the carport.

To complement the front garden, the shade-tolerant 'Sir Walter' Buffalo grass was laid on the verge beneath the existing local Western Australia peppermint tree (*Agonis flexuosa*).

Viewed from the dining, kitchen and lounge area, a large glass window overlooked a 'dead area' that had the potential for a striking visual feature. Here, a three-piece water wall and channel that seemed to cut through the decking was designed to provide light, movement and interest.

The problematic steep rear garden was addressed by building large limestone block planters filled with *cordyline* and *aphiagon*

to frame and extend the alfresco area. Limestone was chosen to match the existing mortar colour and to contrast with the red brickwork. Sustainably sourced Batu decking provides a dramatic angular emphasis across the elevated walkway to the upper level containing the pool area and children's play area complete with sunken trampoline set in the lawn, swing set and cubby house. This area is shaded by two ornamental pears and 'Hawaiian Skies' *hibiscus* provides a burst of colour. Brushwood cladding disguises the old fibre-cement fence behind.

Elegant curved steps lead down to the sunken 'Sir Walter' lawn enclosed by raised limestone beds planted with *magnolia*, *frangipani*, *duranta*, *dianella* and New Zealand flax to provide 'sanctuary' while entertaining or relaxing in the garden. This layering of plants and materials helped to make the area appear visually much larger by leading the eye from the ground upwards and outwards of the garden.

Architectural *Yucca elephantipes* underplanted with *Yucca* 'Golden Sword' provide a focal point and some shade for the imported wooden swing seats. Pleached



garden profile



hedges of Magnolia 'Eximauri' underplanted with dianella and raised planters of cordylines frame the stunning curved rock-clad water feature edged in copper that mirrors the steps opposite.

The rear limestone wall provides a backdrop to the garden but is also a functional aspect as it's also the rear wall of the workshop/garage. Lighting design was also included so that the garden could be illuminated at night to enhance the mood and enjoyment of the area.

All garden beds and lawn areas are irrigated using Netafim sub-surface irrigation to minimise water wastage and possible staining to paving and walls saving around 40 per cent of water normally used on a conventional irrigation system. A fertiliser injection unit was also installed to allow for the easy application of nutrients along with a rain sensor to turn off the irrigation during wet weather. A solar pool blanket was installed to minimise water lost

through evaporation and provide a sustainable method of heating the pool.

The garden was designed and constructed using sustainable and water-wise products and practices wherever possible. This is now a gardening must. All soils, conditioners and mulches used throughout the construction process were compliant with Australian Standard 4454 for Composts, Soil Conditioners and Mulches. Organic fertilisers, polymer crystals and approved wetting agents were used when planting the garden.

Overall, the owners were delighted with the result and the garden has drawn lots of admiration from passersby, particularly the ones who saw it before its revamp.

Colin Barlow is a horticulturist and landscape designer. His landscape design company, Gardens from Eden, is based in Willeton, Western Australia. ■



*"A contemporary twist
on a conventional,
formal garden"*