

SECRET GARDEN

The outside world disappears in this private courtyard garden of luminous greens and wondrous shapes.

STORY Elizabeth Wilson | PHOTOGRAPHY Robert Blackburn

On view from every room in the home, the courtyard looks larger than it is thanks to a layered planting scheme of interesting species including (in the foreground) bright-green plumes of foxtail fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Myersii'), curly jade plant (*Crassula undulata*) and pencil pines (*Cupressus sempervirens* 'Glauca'). Dissolving the solid paving into stepping stones also visually expands the space.

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KATE SEDDON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

Buying an old corner pub and converting it into a contemporary home requires imagination and a sense of adventure. For the owners of this inner-urban Melbourne property the adventure has well and truly paid off, with the creation of a unique residence and an equally gorgeous, jewel-like courtyard garden.

To transform the 1870s building into a family home, they enlisted Don McQualter of Studio McQualter, whose design response was to restore the original corner structure and construct a mirror-image, double-storey building at the other end of the property. To link these bookends he designed a long, single-level pavilion containing an open-plan living zone which is glazed along one entire wall.

At the epicentre of the site is a narrow 15x3m slice of outdoor space, which is framed by these three facets of the home and a tall boundary wall. The owners were keen to make this a textural, plant-filled space. And that's where landscape designer Kate Seddon entered the picture.

"Every room in the home looks out to, or through another room to, this courtyard," says Kate. "It's visible from all angles, so it's an important focal point for the whole home."

The owners were keen to create a European-style courtyard garden like those they'd seen on overseas travels. "They love the gardens you find in Italy, France or Spain where you open a doorway into an enclosed courtyard festooned with vines and pot plants," says Kate. "They wanted to conjure a sense of that here, to create a magical oasis hidden behind the wall."

The site had all the ingredients to achieve this, including the presence of an enigmatic gate in the tall boundary wall (this is the main entry point – there is no conventional front door). Kate's mission was to create a lushly planted wonderland that would give the owners an instant sense of sanctuary from the outside world as soon as they opened the gate. And she has delivered in spades.

When they step inside, the residents are greeted by an "entrance garden" packed with succulents. From there, stepping stones lead in two directions. To the right, they lead to the original corner building. To the left, they lead across a pond and through a lush carpet of creeping thyme to a paved seating area and barbecue beyond. The whole space is designed with consideration of the views from the downstairs living area and upstairs bedrooms.

The plant palette includes a mix of succulents and Mediterranean species, all chosen for their contrasting foliage shapes and textures. Silvery *Teucrium fruticans* sits alongside fluoro-green foxtail fern (*Asparagus densiflorus* 'Myersii'), rosettes of *Agave attenuata* and a strappy ornamental grass (*Miscanthus* 'Kleine Fontaine'). There ▶



are some flowering species (*Stephanotis*, *Rhaphiolepis* and *Euphorbia*) but the focus is on their foliage rather than their flower performance. The courtyard is north-facing, so hardy plants were paramount, and Kate has aimed, wherever possible, to add greenery (Boston ivy) to the walls to help temper the environment and deflect heat.

Kate admits she chose plants for their good looks too. “This garden is not only visible from the ground, it’s also viewed from above – from the upstairs rooms – so the aim was to create a mosaic of plants,” says Kate. “And because it’s always on view, we chose plants that look great year-round. We couldn’t use plants that have a ‘down’ period.”

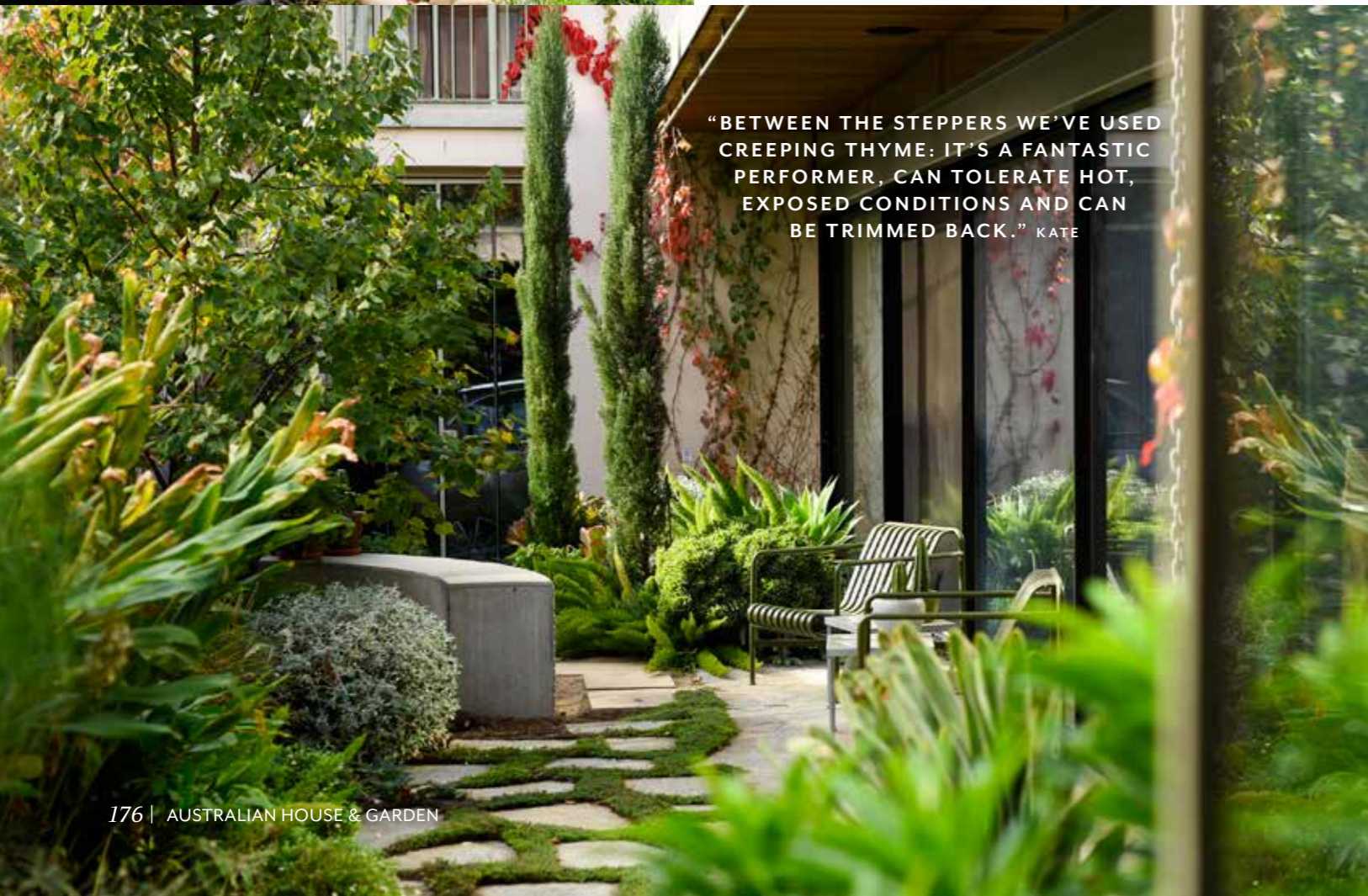
In the centre of the garden is an upright European linden (*Tilia cordata* ‘Greenspire’) which provides a tall canopy layer and serves as the feature shade tree in summer. Underneath it, a curved concrete bench, poured in situ, forms a sculptural element in the space.

The garden is deceptively expansive. “We’ve enhanced the sense of depth by layering the plants – mixing climbers, shrubs and lower ground covers,” says Kate. “I particularly love the way the solid paving dissipates into steppers dotted through the garden. It helps enhance the amount of greenery and make the space feel bigger.”

There are elements of intrigue and surprise too, including a rain chain hanging from the gutter of the middle pavilion. “It slows the flow of water so it doesn’t all rush into the stormwater drains when it rains,” says Kate. “It sounds and looks beautiful when the water runs down.” At the opposite end of the space, near the garage entry, Kate has planted pencil pines (*Cupressus sempervirens* ‘Glauca’), adding a strong vertical element. And below the eaves of the living pavilion is a steel rod with Virginia creeper growing along it, creating veils of foliage that turn fiery orange in autumn.

“There was a lot to fit into this garden – an entry path, access points, a fish pond, paved seating area, and a barbecue,” says Kate. “We did it by creating punctuation points. It packs a whole lot of punch in a small space”. Her industry peers agree, recently naming this project a finalist in The Design Files’ Landscape Design Awards. **H&G Kate Seddon Landscape Design; kslDesign.com.au. Studio McQualter; studiomcqualter.com.**

TOP RIGHT The boundary wall draped in Boston ivy. **BOTTOM RIGHT** The living zone pavilion is glazed on one side, with wall-to-wall views of the courtyard: a rain chain hangs from the gutter and Virginia creeper trails from a steel rod. **OPPOSITE** Clockwise from top left A fan aloe (*Aloe plicatilis*) and cascading string of pearls (*Senecio rowleyanus*) in a pot next to the pond. A mosaic of creeping thyme (between steppers), seaside daisy, orange-tinged *Kalanchoe* ‘Flapjacks’, silvery *Teucrium*, blue-hued creeping spurge (*Euphorbia myrsinites*) and foxtail fern. Providing a ‘ceiling layer’ is a European linden (*Tilia cordata* ‘Greenspire’), a beautiful and hardy shade tree.



“BETWEEN THE STEPPERS WE’VE USED CREEPING THYME: IT’S A FANTASTIC PERFORMER, CAN TOLERATE HOT, EXPOSED CONDITIONS AND CAN BE TRIMMED BACK.” KATE

