Landscaping

The brief
To blend a native and exotic garden to create an inviting and useable oasis.

LANDSCAPER
Matt Leacy (above) Landart Landscapes, Landart.com.au

THE SOURCE
Decomposed granite around the deck for a permeable but hard surface
Sandstone ballast on feature walls sourced mainly on site
Spotted gum timber deck and jetty

Plants

SUCCULENTS

Crassula blue bird
This plant has a thick, tree-like trunk and grows up to one metre tall. It is drought tolerant and grows well in free draining soil.

Beschoneria
A native of Mexico, this strappy plant has sword-shaped leaves with a clumping rosette. It prefers a sunny position.

GRASSES

Lomandra tanika
This hardy grass has proved popular thanks to its low maintenance, qualities. It's attractive weeping effect is ideal for mass planting.

Miscanthus sinensis
Sometimes known as zebra or maiden grass, this east Asian native is a well-behaved plant with a clumping habit and reed-like stems.

Where the grass is greener

Residents and visitors come together in this semi-rural idyll, writes **Robyn Willis**

When landscape designers are working out a planting scheme, they naturally consider the best plants for the site.

Local conditions such as soil quality, prevailing winds and topography all impact on which plants will be most successful.

But when landscaper Matt Leacy walked on to this site on Sydney's northern beaches, there was an altogether different problem with which to contend.

Spread over 1.6ha, the former farmland at Terrey Hills included a house surrounded by an exotic garden and a sprawling site featuring a range of native plants and a dam.

While the owners wanted to integrate the exotic garden into the native environment more successfully, Matt says the main stumbling block was the appetite of the locals.

"The wallabies that came onto the property ate everything we put out," he says.

"We deliberately put plants out to see if there was something that they wouldn't eat but there was nothing they didn't like."

Visible view

The owners wanted to make their dam more accessible and visible and had already concreted it to stabilise water levels.

First order of business was a new fence to keep larger wildlife at bay and secure the site.

With such a substantial area to work with, Matt set about designing a more accessible pathway from the house through the property to the dam via a timber walkway.

As the site sloped away from the house, there was an opportunity to create a relaxing vantage point halfway down the path with a platform large enough to accommodate a dining space complete with built-in seating.

Sandstone sourced mostly on site was used to create low retaining walls, giving the platform a sense of structure, while a mature jacaranda was planted to provide shade.

"It's the perfect point to overlook the property," he says.

To create better access to the dam, Matt proposed a wide timber jetty, while a separate bridge would offer a more direct route through the garden.

"We built the bridge to give direct access to the rest of the property so that you wouldn't have to walk all the way around," he says.

However, the dam had already been concreted so supporting piers which would have penetrated the bottom were not an option. Instead, the jetty was cantilevered over the water to provide a comfortable vantage point, while river stones sourced sustainably were added to the dam to help it blend into the natural environment.

Open garden scheme

Previously, Matt says dense shrubbery meant the dam was only partially visible from some parts of the property.

The plan was to open up the view across the water and beyond to the rest of the garden while maintaining the casual semi-rural feel.

Some of the larger shrubs were removed,

Timber steps lead to the dam where a cantilevered jetty floats above the water.

Butterfly effect
Hard and soft landscaping combine here to create an inviting vantage point. Native and exotic grasses soften the edges of the spotted gum timber decking which is deep enough to provide casual seating when needed. A butterfly chair from The Design Hunter is ideally positioned to enjoy the view.

opening up Matt's landscaping scheme which relied on drifts of mass plantings, especially native grasses, with a mix of indigenous and exotic plants interspersed closer to the house.

"We were looking to blur the lines between the exotic and the native gardens," he says.

"As you move away from the house, it becomes more and more native as we added different plants throughout. But it is still quite exotic off the house with a few natives mixed through."

Even though it is a big site, Matt, a member of the Landscape Association of NSW, says keeping the planting scheme simple is the key to a cohesive look.

"It can be really tempting to go with every flower you see but it can work well restricting yourself a little," he says. "If you are planting your own garden, look at how the textures of different plants work together. On a property of that size, grasses are the perfect solution."

Dietary restrictions

Grasses proved to be the least palatable option for the local wildlife, as long as they were afforded some protection early on.

"Planting mature plants is quite expensive but the younger grass plants will grow quite quickly so it saves a lot of money," Matt says.

While the mature trees on the site were maintained, some plants were removed to open up the site and improve flow through the whole garden.

"We didn't get rid of any major trees, mainly just large shrubs," Matt says. "For anything we had to take out, we put a lot more back in."

The garden has become a beautiful space shared not just with the family but an abundance of wildlife such as water dragons and smaller marsupials.

Even the wallabies have returned, albeit in more manageable numbers, to enjoy the maturing environment.

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Pictures Jason Busch

The dining area includes accessories and furniture from Tait and The Design Hunter.