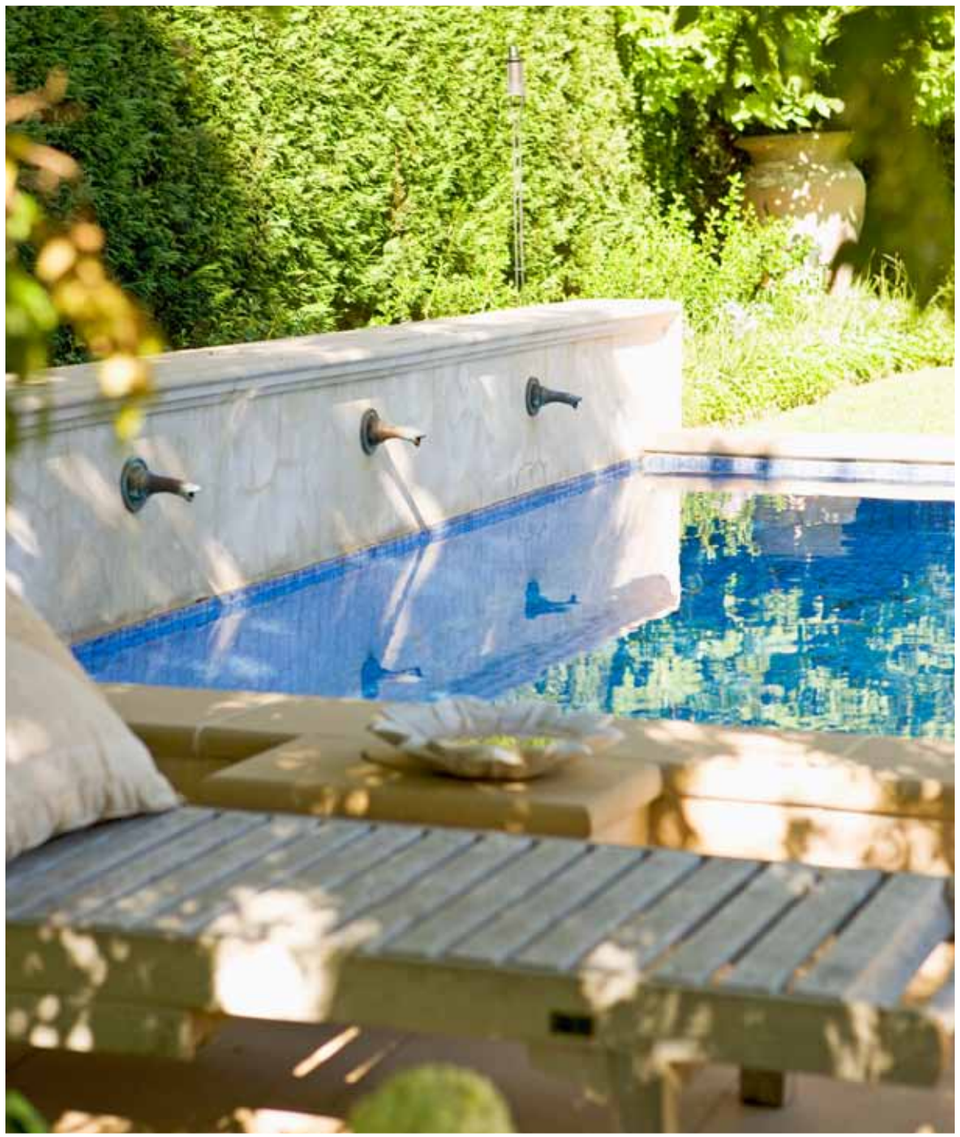


A fine tradition

This owners of this Federation-style home came up with some inventive ideas for their garden, thanks to the help of a creative designer

WORDS **DONYALE HARRISON** PHOTOGRAPHY **JASON BUSCH**

ILLUSTRATION STARA DAVY

"I was adamant THAT I WANTED A GARDEN IN FLOWER ALL THROUGH THE YEAR, BUT I NEEDED SOMEONE WHO COULD TAKE MY IDEAS AND MAKE THEM REALITY"

When Susie Blumentals and her husband Michael first looked at a Federation house on Sydney's leafy upper north shore, they liked its architecture and saw enough space for themselves and their two daughters, Emma and Chloe – but that wasn't what convinced them. As Susie says, "I saw the wonderful mature camellias and white magnolias; they looked so beautiful, they made us buy the property!"

As keen gardeners, Susie and Michael were both eager to create a garden that looked as though it had come from the pages of the garden design books they love. "I had it all in my head," says Susie, "but I couldn't do it without expert help. I knew how I wanted it to flow, how I wanted it to fit together, and I was adamant that I wanted something in flower all through the year, but I needed someone who could take my ideas and make them reality."

Enter the team from Landart, headed up by designer Matt Leacy. "This was a collaborative project," says Matt. "We provided the design and directed the project all the way through, with our own construction team. The owners are both avid gardeners and wanted to be very involved with the final garden."

Susie admits it was a beneficial experience for both parties. "Landart's horticulturists helped us with our plant selection and took my vague ideas for wanting hydrangeas and roses and chose varieties that gave the most impact and grew easily in our conditions."

Of course, there were a few debates along the way. "Matt tried to talk me out of lawn," says Susie with a laugh, "but we have kids and I adore green. We've worked together on everything from the landscaping and design to the tricks of the trade that helped us through the drought and this year's rains."

Designed to work in harmony with the period lines of the house, the garden is, on the one hand, a clever reinterpretation of the classic formal garden, incorporating red-flowered lilli pillies and ground covers of bugle and Chinese star jasmine. On the other hand, it is a practical outdoor living space that works well for this young and active family.

"The girls have their friends over and they spend all day out by the pool (opposite) and in the cabana," says Susie. "We also have a mini-bathroom in the rear of the garage, so they don't need to come inside at all."

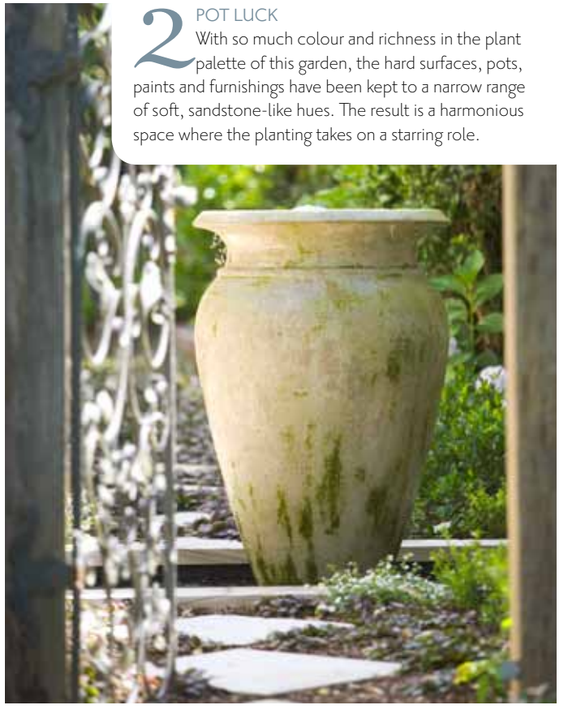
For their hardworking parents, too, the space is a sanctuary. "Michael and I will often spend a hard day at work in the garden, then sit out the back and have a glass of wine and admire it," says Susie. "We start the day by opening up our French doors onto the courtyard. The sun seeps in and we can hear the water trickling in the urn and I can see my favourite wrought-iron gate. It's perfection."

Tip: Perseverance can pay off. Susie fell in love with the wrought-iron gate (see page 186) at first sight, but the price was too high. Over the following years, she saw it time and again. "Four years later, I asked what they wanted for it... They quoted me less than a third of the ticket price." If an object you love has been sitting at your supplier for years, make an offer. They may be happy to regain the space. >

Top 3 style makers

1 PAVING THE WAY

Clever and subtle changes in surface materials define different sections of the garden. The courtyard outside the master bedroom is paved with large blocks of sandstone tapering to smaller pavers, which run down a side path and past the girls' bedrooms to the mostly lawn-covered back garden. The pool surround moves from the paved entertaining area near the cabana to a thick swath of lawn at the far end – creating a private adult retreat.



2 POT LUCK

With so much colour and richness in the plant palette of this garden, the hard surfaces, pots, paints and furnishings have been kept to a narrow range of soft, sandstone-like hues. The result is a harmonious space where the planting takes on a starring role.

3 HEDGE YOUR BETS

Topiary is the key to maintaining the formal feel of the garden design. Despite the lush abundance of many of the beds, the cypress-fenced perimeter and box-edged lawns reinforce the fact that this is a grand garden for a fine house. Well-maintained box balls (top) in substantial planters echo the effect.

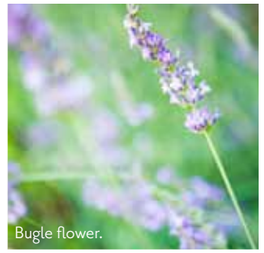
Star plants

LEIGHTON GREEN CYPRESS (*x Cupressocyparis leylandii*): Thanks to its propensity to obscure views, the Leighton Green has evoked much passion in its time yet, grown responsibly, Leighton Green cypress provides a fast-growing, dense hedge in a beautiful rich mid-green. With growth rates of about a metre a year, up to 30m high and 5m wide, it's for very large gardens or dedicated gardeners prepared to commit the long-term resources required. Susie is religious about her pruning, and sends the gardeners around to prune on her neighbours' sides, too. Leighton Green cypress grows best in temperate areas and will tolerate frost and salt.

CAMELLIA: Susie and Michael were first attracted to the mature camellias and have maintained them throughout the garden. Older trees such as these have wonderfully detailed trunks and provide good shade year round. Months of spot flowers culminate in an astonishing main display at staggered times between autumn and spring. Camellias require rich soil and moderate water as their roots do not penetrate deeply. Best in temperate and subtropical areas.

BUGLE (*Ajuga reptans*): This old-fashioned ground cover deserves to be more popular. Used around paving, it is a fast-growing low plant at around 30cm wide, with flower spikes, up to 30cm high, of rich blue flowers borne through spring and summer. The most common leaf colour is dark green, but yellow-green, silver, chocolate and burgundy varieties, such as the 'Atropurpurea' used in this garden, are also available. It is a hardy plant that will cope with most conditions, provided there is sufficient water and drainage. Rich soils produce the best flower spikes.

Leighton Green cyprus.

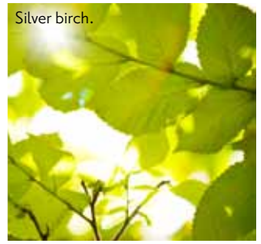


Bugle flower.

Aeoniunium cultivar.

Camellia.

Bugle.



Silver birch.

Silver birch in pots MAKE GOOD STATEMENT TREES THANKS TO SLIM, SMOOTH TRUNKS AND BRIGHT FOLIAGE WHICH GLOWS LIME GREEN IN THE MIDDAY SUN.

Design file

DESIGN: Landart Landscapes; call (02) 9439 6853 or visit www.landart.com.au.
ACCESSORIES: The wrought-iron gate and large urns are from Parker's Nursery; call (02) 9487 3888.
PAVERS: Sandstone paving, Capricorn Stone; call (02) 4340 4377 or visit www.capricornstone.com.au.

1. Terrace.
2. Paved courtyard.
3. Cabana.
4. Bench seat.

PHOTO OF CAMELIA COURTESY OF YOUR GARDEN MAGAZINE. GARDEN PLAN ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATHRYN LEE