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GARDEN PROFILE:

# MODERN MAGIC

## MID-CENTURY INSPIRED DESIGN MEETS FAMILY-FRIENDLY FUNCTION IN THIS SYDNEY SANCTUARY

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PHOTOGRAPHY **BRIGID ARNOTT**

CUSHIONS (OPPOSITE) **BONNIE AND NEIL**

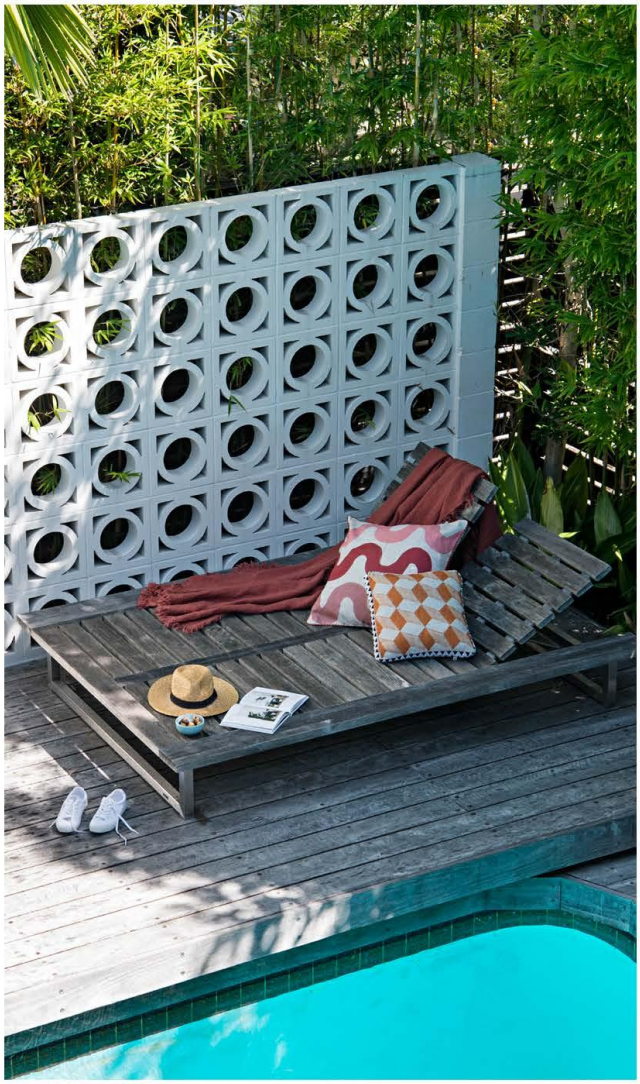
**TOWERING PALMS AND CRISP** white breeze blocks may suggest Palm Springs, but instead of California, this sun-drenched oasis is hidden away on Sydney's lower north shore. Its clean lines and streamlined design pay homage to the contemporary era of the house it belongs to, but it wasn't always so fitting.

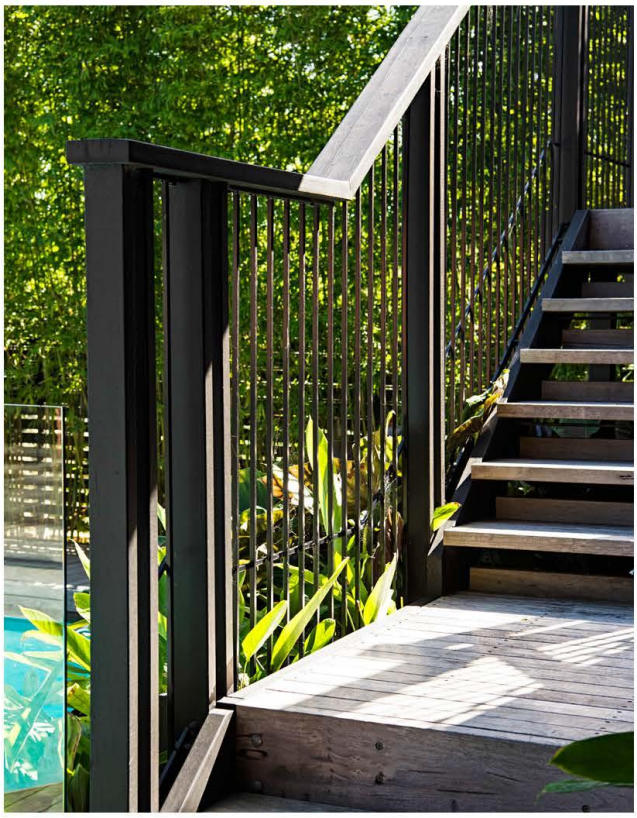
Sharlene and Chris purchased their home six years ago after falling in love with its mid-century charm, but its original old-English-style garden left them perplexed. "It just didn't suit the style of the house – there were hedges and camellia bushes and old, uneven brick paving," explains Sharlene. "It was a real mismatch." Determined to bring it in line with a retro aesthetic, the homeowners enlisted the help of Landart director and landscape designer Matt Leacy. "They wanted to create a relaxed environment with a family focus, while staying true to the style of the home," says Matt. >

*"It is quite common to have an old pool that was built 50–60 years ago in the wrong spot in the backyard, but with the right design you don't need to rip out the pool and start again"*
*~ Matt Leacy, Landart director and landscape designer*

**table setting** *An exposed and spacious dining area (opposite) beside the pool (above) has served the family well since it was put up. "I wouldn't say we're big entertainers, but now we love having people over – after lunch, we'll move down here for afternoon coffee and cake while the kids are in the pool," says Sharlene. Adds landscape designer Matt: "We wanted this to be a really usable space for functions and parties and hosting Christmas."*

**breeze blocks** *You'd be forgiven for thinking the iconic white breeze blocks (right) were an original feature of the home, but in fact, they were another strategic addition by Matt to help elevate the mid-century style of the space. "I have to say, they are my favourite feature out here," says homeowner Sharlene. "They just make it feel really beautiful."*





**Stairs** *Creating a connection between the pool and an upper-level balcony was a necessity. "Before the makeover, Chris and Sharlene were either upstairs, or having to be down here with the kids – now there's an easier flow," says Matt. But with the staircase bordering the pool, safety regulations had to be met. "It's not a regular balustrade – one side is a little higher to meet the required standards."*

< "They were very committed to that look, and wanted to introduce that feel throughout the garden," says Matt Leacy.

While the couple initially disagreed on some of the minor additions such as artificial turf and a water feature by the pool, their primary motivation was one and the same – to create a more functional and open-plan backyard for their children, Callum, nine, and Thea, six, to enjoy all year round. First on the family's wishlist was to bring the original pool back to life. "We wanted to make the pool a feature in itself, but we also wanted to simplify it," Sharlene says.

With a careful plan and new decking, it was safely and stylishly revived. "With the right design you don't necessarily need to take out the pool and start again – sometimes you can save on waste and actually make sense of what's already in place," says Matt. Lush green foliage, easy maintenance and a sense of privacy were also top priorities, all of which were addressed by clever planting choices. "The whole process really reminded me that planting is so important," says Sharlene. "I'm not a gardener but I love plants and we are really enjoying that feeling of being surrounded by greenery again."

***"I just wanted something that was really practical and simple but still beautiful" ~ Sharlene, homeowner***

**Pool** *New decking was installed to simplify the shape of the pool and introduce sharp, clean lines to the landscape to complement the house, but it was no easy feat. "The pool isn't parallel with the boundaries, or with the house, so that was a challenge," admits Matt.*

**CAST IRON PLANT**

*Chosen for their ability to withstand neglect, cast iron plants add colour beside the pool. They are ideal for garden beds nestled beneath tall bamboo and palm trees and are known for success in shady spots. Japanese silver grass, planted in between, brings a touch of movement and elegance.*

**BAMBOO**

*Privacy was another concern for the family. "We needed to go for something that was obviously going to screen out neighbouring yards, but also create a lush foliage feel so it softens up all the hardscapes," explains Matt. With only a narrow garden bed to work with, bamboo ticked all the boxes.*

## SOURCE BOOK

**Landscape design** *Matt Leacy, Landart, (02) 9958 0462, landart.com.au*

CUSHIONS (TOP LEFT) **BONNIE AND NEIL**