

waterfront living

In need of rejuvenation, this harbourside garden has been granted a new new lease on life with a bright, breezy Mediterranean-style makeover

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design file

OBJECTIVE

Taking a garden that had served a family well when the kids were young, and turning it into a luxurious entertaining space for the adults, was the aim. Tired areas were to be refreshed, a new living zone created, and the incredible water vista celebrated.

SOLUTION

A breezy Mediterranean-inspired design was conceived to complement the waterside setting. This finds expression in the planting, pots, paving and colour palette. On the lawn level, a new lounge area was created while the outdoor kitchen received a facelift.

OUTCOME

The reimagined garden has a light, bright Mediterranean look that will never date, and now that the existing outdoor spaces have been revitalised, and augmented with a cosy lower-level living area, the owners have all they need to enjoy the ultimate in relaxed yet sophisticated waterfront living.

Now that the children were older and no longer in need of an active play area, it was time for the grown-ups to make their move. At long last they could claim the waterfront garden as their own and turn it into a luxurious haven, dedicated to relaxation and entertaining, worthy of the incredible location.

The property is in Woolwich on Sydney's Lower North Shore. It sits right on the water and has its own mooring. "This peninsula suburb is all about luxury living at its best with a great mix of heritage and contemporary homes sitting side by side," says Adam Robinson, the landscape designer, horticulturist and stylist the owners entrusted with the transformation.

"The owners wanted a grown-up garden where they could entertain friends, enjoy cooking, dining and great conversation outdoors. They envisaged being able to swim in the pool and have a breakout area they could use to drink in the view, laze in the sun, read a book or savour a glass of wine."

To improve the aesthetics and functionality of the sun-drenched outdoor spaces, Adam conceived a Mediterranean-inspired design that encompassed a fresh planting palette, a new outdoor living zone, and a revitalisation of the existing areas. "We included some seamless garden upgrades that would cater to a sophisticated adult's everyday lifestyle



The garden's lower level forges a seamless connection with the serene harbour waters and captures spectacular views of the city

“People want to be able to ‘live’ in their gardens, not just admire them through the windows of the house



The outdoor kitchen was given a facelift, which included new V-groove cabinetry in fresh, crisp white

as well as entertaining and recreation on the weekends and during holidays,” says Adam.

“The waterfront location greatly informed the easy-breezy Mediterranean-influenced design,” he adds. “In keeping with this theme, we painted the walls white and kept this motif across the whole project.”

In traditional Mediterranean style, the predominant white-on-white colour scheme is accented by nature’s hues: a medley of rich greens from the lawn and plants; fresh blues from the glistening water and the sky on a clear summer’s day.

While the waterside location was the main inspiration for the uplifting design, it presented a challenge when choosing the plants. “The garden is north-east facing and gets hammered by the sun as soon as it rises; moreover, the salt-laden winds and exposed conditions meant the plants needed to be tough,” says Adam.

“The Mediterranean-style plantings we selected are very hardy species, chosen because they can withstand the punishing waterfront location. Although the selection process was rigorous, to ensure the plants don’t dry out, an automated irrigation system was installed.”

In a front corner of the pool, right at the water’s edge, is a dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*), its unmistakable architectural form drawing the eye. A stroll around the garden reveals more resilient beauties, including the fox tail agave (*Agave attenuata*), easily distinguished by its graceful arching leaves and distinctive rosette configuration, the Mexican lily (*Beschorneria yuccoides*), with its long, sword-shaped leaves, and the jade plant (*Crassula ovata*), a succulent with small, glossy oval foliage.

Look a bit more and you’ll notice the aloe hybrids, *Aloe ‘Bush Baby Yellow’* and *Aloe ‘Tusker’*, with their structured rosette formation and tell-tale leaf margins dotted with tiny spines, and, for contrast, *Lomandra longifolia*, a grass-like plant with flowing, strappy flat leaves.

Contributing silver foliage evocative of the Mediterranean is lavender cotton bush (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), which in spring and summer delights with yellow button blooms, and the succulent *Kalanchoe ‘Silver Spoons’*, ablaze with red and orange flower spikes in spring. Then there’s the trailing rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). This actually hails from the Mediterranean and adds its authentic aroma to the mix.

As this was a garden the owners wanted to relax and entertain in, rejuvenating the outdoor kitchen and dining area that sat



The creation of a lounge area in the sunken garden adds valuable space for entertaining or relaxation



To survive the full force of the sun, the constant salt spray and weather extremes, the plants had to be especially hardy

on the upper level, adjacent to the house, was considered a priority. “This part of the project was particularly satisfying as it turned out brilliantly,” says Adam.

“The bones of the old outdoor kitchen were retained and we freshened everything up with smart, white V-grooved outdoor cabinetry to add texture and Outdoor Caesarstone benchtops in Clearskies, a soft concrete-grey colour. For continuity, Clearskies runs up the splashback, too. We avoided using handles on the cabinets for a simple, pared-back look that allows the benchtops to be the hero.”

The pizza oven and barbecue were cleaned and polished to give them an as-new look and with this, the outdoor kitchen’s cosmetic makeover was complete. Although this was only a skin-deep refresh, it gave the whole area a big lift and the use of white cabinetry reinforced the Mediterranean theme.

To create another outdoor living space, and introduce more texture, oversized white sandstone stepping pads were placed in a corner of the lawn. It was in this spot Adam set up a lounge area for relaxed drinks with friends or simply savouring the view. This lower level feels like a sunken garden, making you feel cosseted, so although the vista is expansive, relaxing on one of the outdoor sofas is quite a cosy experience.

Ramping up the cosiness factor, there is a fire pit to take the chill out of a winter’s day. This has a wooden top that can be popped in place, turning it into a handy coffee table when the fire is not needed. And for sultry summer days, there is a cantilevered umbrella to provide respite from the sun.

The main decorative elements are white pots, used on both levels of the garden and the balconies. At the edge of the grassed lower level, flanking the entrance to the timber jetty, there are large urn-style pots with a distressed rustic finish, in keeping with the Mediterranean aesthetic.

This harbourside retreat is indicative of what most people now expect from their outdoor spaces. “It’s about creating a resort experience or sanctuary at home. And it’s about making these spaces as functional and as beautiful as possible,” says Adam.

“Today, people want to be able to ‘live’ in their gardens, not just admire them through the windows of the house. They desire total immersion in their outdoor spaces and the owners of this garden have this. They enjoy every aspect of their garden and spending time in the different destinations within it.”

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The kitchen benchtops and splashback were finished in Caesarstone Clearskies, a contemporary soft-grey concrete hue