

coastal cool



Must-have materials and native plantings bring layers of inviting colour and texture to this garden on Sydney's northern beaches

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THIS PAGE Corten-steel retaining walls are a great solution for a sloping site. Salt and pepper gravel creates sound and texture underfoot. Kahvi limestone pavers, Artisan Exterior. Robert Plumb letterbox, discontinued. Plants include existing kentia palms, frangipani, mock orange and New Zealand hair sedge while tri-colour jasmine creeps up the verandah.
OPPOSITE (left) The sandstone boulder is from Australian Native Landscapes. Putt path light, Terradiance. (Right) Colourful sedum ('Autumn Joy').



A sense of coastal cool permeates the outdoor spaces enjoyed by Kate and Steve and their daughters: Emma, nine, and Ruby, six. Though they live on Sydney's northern beaches, they rarely venture to the ocean just down the road because landscape designer Adam Robinson has delivered the beach to them in buckets and shovels!

The property was cool – too cool – in a less appealing way when they bought it in 2019. “The house was less than a year old and the garden seemed like an afterthought,” says Kate. “It didn’t have a real sense of itself and the basic functioning wasn’t there, plus the entertaining space was very cramped. And the stark, white house felt like a fridge, without warmth. We thought a well-thought-out garden could really differentiate the place and give it personality.”

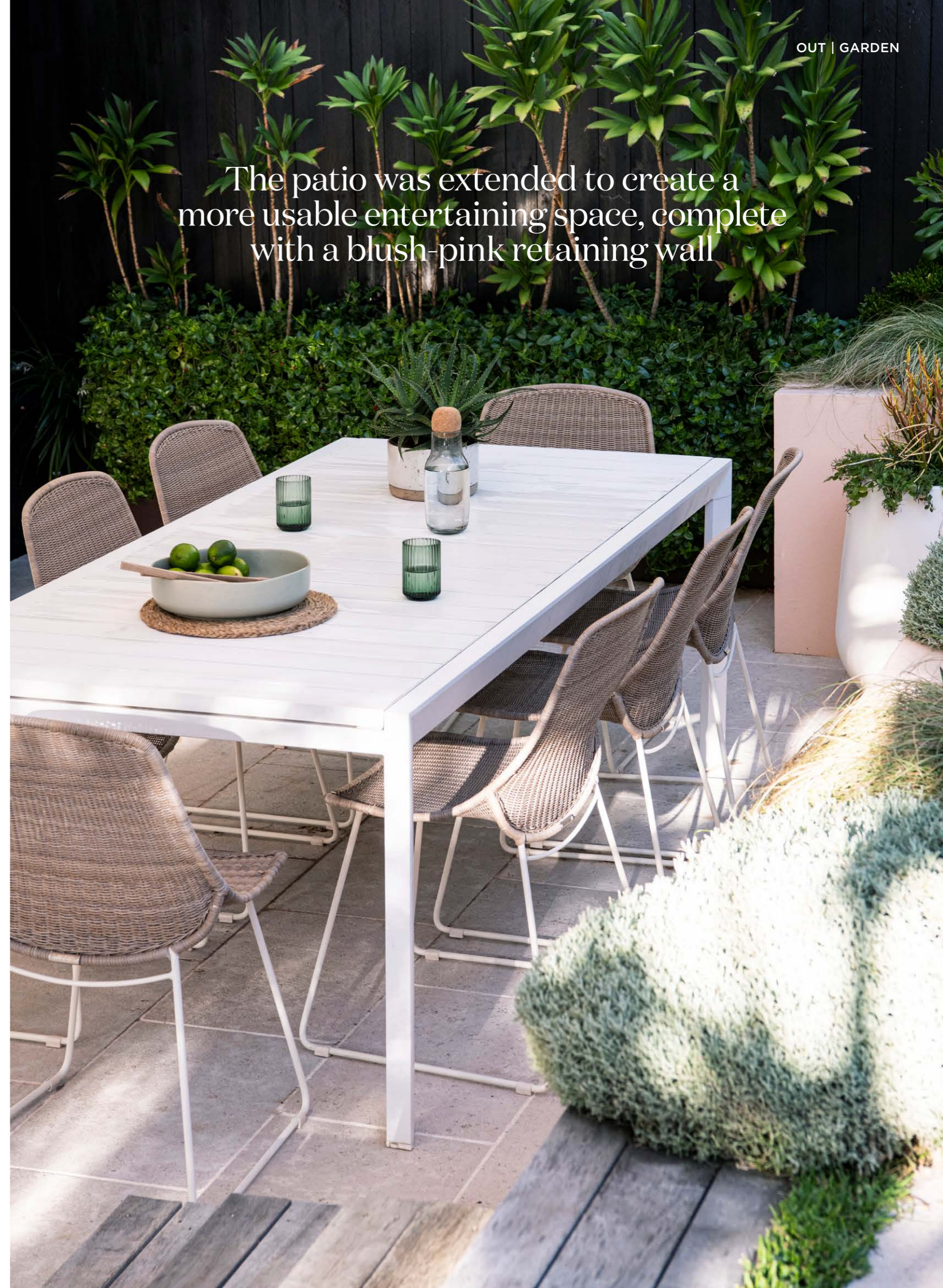
Having worked on the family’s previous garden, Adam was keen to repeat the experience with this project in 2020, by creating a coastal hideaway befitting the house – a humble weatherboard with Hamptons undertones. He was met by a ho-hum garden with a “poor street presence and no sense of place, which failed to work with the slope”. Add to that sparse plantings, pine retaining walls and an entertaining area that was barely large enough to swing a palm frond.

But there were virtues. As well as a north-facing backyard drenched with sun, it boasted handsome mature plants, which Adam wanted to retain – including two kentia palms and two frangipanis at the front as well as strelitzias and kentias at the back – but they would need juggling to create something special. “We wanted to use as many of the original plants as possible,” says Kate. “Adam had a sense of how a garden would grow and mature into itself, as we’d seen that in our first house, where the garden had enriched the property. We wanted to recreate that, but with a more kid-friendly focus. It had to be primarily made up of natives, be easy to maintain and have a feminine element to soften the exterior of our home.”

“The brief was for a relaxed, laid-back space, unpretentious and with a coastal feel but also soft and pretty, with seasonal changes,” says Adam. At the front, he introduced a series of levels, which were demarcated with beds in Corten steel – its rusted, weathered quality bringing warmth – while step risers leading to the front door have been infilled with recycled timber, delivering the sun-bleached authenticity of ocean piers. “The Corten steel lends an edginess, and the risers have a strength and solidity,” he adds. Meanwhile, salt and pepper aggregate “has a simplicity and sounds great underfoot”.

At the back, he reprised the Corten steel along the fence line, using it for deep planters. Strikingly, he extended the patio to

BOTH PAGES A built-in day bed beside the barbecue creates an inviting nook on the patio next to the house. The tray table provides the stylish finishing touch – “the lipstick”, according to Kate. Rendered retaining walls in Dawn Patrol by Tint. Kahvi limestone pavers from Artisan Exterior. Spotted gum is left to weather naturally on the steps. An Electrolux barbecue from Winning Appliances is integrated into a Caesarstone Midday benchtop. Sarah Ellison ‘Beach Club’ tiles on risers from Teranova. Lily Tray table from Tait. Some of the nearby plantings include giant bird of paradise, *Grevillea* ‘Pink Surprise’, cotton lavender, bougainvillea and century plants. A new dwarf date palm sits in the middle of the hardy Sir Walter buffalo lawn.



The patio was extended to create a more usable entertaining space, complete with a blush-pink retaining wall

make it a more usable entertaining space, complete with a sprawling built-in day bed and barbecue, plus a retaining wall in one of Adam's favourite hues – an inviting salmon pink. Tiles sporting a shell-like scallop pattern, again alluding to the coast, adorn the steps.

“For the plantings, we wanted something that wasn't too perfect or fussy, which included natives with all shades of green and grasses that move with the breeze,” says Kate. High on the wishlist were greyish foliage and seasonal flowers that shift invitingly with the seasons, always offering a sense of surprise.

For a “sense of place”, Adam introduced natives, including grevillea, coastal rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*), she-oak (*Casuarina glauca* ‘Cousin It’), silver spur (*Plectranthus argentatus*) and spiny-headed mat rush (*Lomandra longifolia*). Exotics such as cotton lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), butterfly bush (*Buddleja*) and New Zealand rock lily (*Arthropodium cirratum*) team foliage contrasts with a flowering habit. As a result, the garden never stands still from one month to the next – *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ shifts from pale pink flowers in summer through to a rich copper in late autumn. The olive-green fronds of New Zealand hair sedge (*Carex testacea*) evolve from copper in summer to orange in winter. As well as layers of colour and texture, movement comes from grasses and perennials shimmering in the wind.

Jasmine (*Stephanotis* ‘Tricolour’) trained up the front verandah softens the once-brrrrr white facade, aided by foundations

painted a pale grey. Hair sedge and kidney weed (*Dichondra* ‘Silver Falls’) cascade down the Corten planters while grevillea and transplanted frangipani and kentia offset the weatherboard's straight lines and right angles. Meanwhile, at the rear, a pygmy palm in the middle of the Sir Walter buffalo grass lawn delivers height and volume, “a ceiling over the day bed”, says Adam. Bougainvillea espaliered along the fence provides a soft wall behind the barbecue. Tough-as natives are augmented by equally robust exotics such as *Xanadu philodendrons* and agaves.

“I love the lush planting, with green piling over the Corten steel, as well as the curves and textures and layers in the flower beds,” says Kate. “Adam and his team have given our family a beautiful backdrop for childhood memories, special events and everyday living. You cannot underestimate how much a well-considered garden adds to your life.” **LO**

See more Adam Robinson Design projects at adamrobinsondesign.com and [@adamrobinsondesign](https://www.instagram.com/adamrobinsondesign)

THIS PAGE (left) The front garden's Corten-steel retaining walls are reprised beside the pool, where they house transplanted giant birds of paradise and kentia palms, together with New Zealand rock lily and native violet. Khavi limestone coping and Hisbalit 366A Spanish glass mosaic pool tiles from Artisan Exterior. (Right) Custom cupboard in spotted gum with benchtop in Caesarstone Middy. **OPPOSITE** Adam extended the patio to make it a more useful space for entertaining. Granada ‘Scoop’ dining chairs in Chalk/White from GlobeWest. Table, pre-existing. Plants include cotton lavender, lucky bamboo, heartleaf ice plant and New Zealand hair sedge.



THIS PAGE More Kahvi limestone pavers from Artisan Exterior and Sarah Ellison 'Beach Club' tiles from Teranova. Steps in weathered spotted gum. In the bed are cotton lavender, New Zealand hair sedge and bush baby aloe. **OPPOSITE** The humungous day bed fronted in weathered spotted gum is big enough to seat the whole family. Lily metal side table, Tait.

GREAT FINDS



1 Bang & Olufsen 'Beosound A1' portable bluetooth speaker in Gold, \$600, David Jones. **2** Città heavy linen jute cushion in Plum, \$97, RJ Living. **3** Anne Black Design flowerpot in Cream, \$59, Hardtofind. **4** Vintage linen throw in Sand, \$169, Aura Home. **5** Hisbalit Mosaico '366A' Spanish glass pool tiles, POA, Artisan Exterior. **6** Low-sheen exterior paint in Dawn Patrol, \$109 per 4L, Tint. **7** Beefeater Signature 'ProLine 6B' built-in barbecue with hood, \$3799, Harvey Norman. **8** Kahvi limestone pavers in Natural, POA, Artisan Exterior. **9** Eva Solo 'Solar' lantern, \$450, Hardtofind. **10** Country Road 'Teer' placemat, \$29.95, David Jones. **11** Sarah Ellison 'Beach Club Scallop' encaustic tiles, POA, Teranova. **12** Gather Round 'Kos' extendable table, \$899, Temple & Webster. **13** Granada 'Scoop' dining chair in Chalk/White, \$775, GlobeWest. **14** Villeroy & Bosch 'Longdrink' glass tumbler in Sage, \$34.95 for two, David Jones. **15** Luigi Bormioli 'Sublime' carafe with cork, \$49.95, David Jones. **16** Country Style gardening gloves, \$63.50, Hardtofind. **17** Lily Tray powdercoated-metal coffee table in Burgundy Clay Textured, \$1589, Tait. **18** Canvas kneeler, \$107.50, Hardtofind. **19** Fiskars X-series L Bypass pruner, \$69, Bunnings.



“The pygmy palm in the middle of the garden delivers height and volume, like a ceiling over the day bed”

ADAM ROBINSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER