

HIDDEN ASSETS

Finding a clever way to conceal the family cars led to a new outlook for the owners of this Sydney home

Landscape designer Adam Robison rezoned this garden and made the L-shaped built-in seat its centrepiece. Neighbour screening on the side and feature screening at the rear (on right, not visible) draw the eye to the centre of the garden and away from the now-concealed cars.

VOLLEY CHAIR, TAIT

WORDS NIGEL BARTLETT PHOTOGRAPHY SUE STUBBS



Top The splashback of the barbecue area ties in with the garden's other decorative tiles. **Above** Adam Robinson. **Opposite** Instead of concealing the two-car garage with a fixed screen, Robinson opted for a retractable screen that can be closed to door width for small gatherings or opened almost fully for parties. The occasional table at the built-in seat makes a conversation space, but swap it for an outdoor dining table and you have an alfresco meal spot.

When you live in a busy, bustling suburb, you want your garden to be a sanctuary from the hectic world beyond the gate. That's not easy to achieve when your outlook takes in a paved parking spot and an ugly roller door. Yet challenges often give rise to wonderful solutions. At a terrace house in Sydney's Balmain, dealing with this conundrum led to a transformation that created a whole new vista.

Homeowners Sophie and Adam Trippe-Smith were fed up with looking at their car at the end of the garden. While the couple's two children, son Emerson, 11, and daughter Tatum, 8, had a patch of lawn to play on, the only outdoor space to relax or entertain in was a small barbecue area next to the house.

Sophie enlisted the help of landscape designer Adam Robinson, who could see that the highly visible parking spot was a problem. He decided to knock out the roller door, widen the entrance and build a garage big enough to house (and hide) both of the family's cars. That could have left them looking at a plain expanse of wall, so he designed a beautiful laser-cut screen made from powdercoated aluminium instead.

"I wanted to create a garage that didn't look like a garage – one that was quite ornamental and which felt like a part of the garden rather than an awful blank wall to stare at," Robinson explains. "There's a lacework pattern to the screen that makes it feel stylish and architectural, but also brings a sense of softness."

The screen can be opened to just a door's width, or can be slid back fully. This means the family can use the space when they have parties, barbecues and the like. "I love the flow-through feeling the screen creates, and it works really well on a practical

BARBECUE AREA SPLASHBACK AND TILES UNDER BUILT-IN SEAT, ONSITE SUPPLY & DESIGN. CUSTOM CUSHIONS MADE USING SCHUMACHER FABRIC. HARI SCREEN (OPPOSITE) DESIGNED BY ADAM ROBINSON. TERRACE OCCASIONAL TABLE, TAIT



"The lacework pattern to the screen makes it feel stylish and architectural but also brings a sense of softness"

ADAM ROBINSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER





Above Sick of looking at their cars, the family now loves the rear aspect. The timber-like plank tiles are similar to the internal floorboards and softened by mondo-grass borders. **Opposite** A large round mirror in the corner reflects light and views as you move around the space.

plant life

Lush tropical greenery and cloud topiary make for a sophisticated yet playful scheme



Strelitzia nicolai



Asparagus densiflorus 'Meyersii'



Blechnum 'Silver Lady'



Juniperus cloud tree

level," says Sophie. "Caterers can come in and set up in the opened-up garage, with beer and wine on tap for guests."

Sophie wanted the garden to be an oasis that contrasts with the wonderful riot of colour inside her recently renovated home. "I love being surrounded by colour, but I didn't want the outside to be so intense," she explains. "I wanted it to be serene, calm and lush, with lots of green."

With that in mind, Robinson chose plants with a variety of heights and foliage. "It was all about shape and texture instead of flowers," he says. The rounded forms of cloud trees appear to float across the garage screen, further softening the screen without blocking it. Large bird-of-paradise plants (*Strelitzia nicolai*) give a thick, palm-tree effect along one side of the garden.

Large timber-look ceramic tiles extend the indoors out through the garden. These are divided by strips of mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus nana*) to prevent the area looking "like a concrete jungle", says Robinson. "We used an outdoor version of tiles that were used inside the house. This creates a seamless flow, while the grass strips bleed the landscape into the hard elements."

Another priority was to create different seating areas in which to relax, eat or entertain. The family now have a variety of options, with furniture that can be mixed and matched. In front of the garage screen, Robinson designed a cantilevered L-shaped wooden bench that's perfect for lounging on. Adding an occasional table and chairs turns it into the ultimate relaxation spot, but when the those pieces are swapped out for an outdoor dining table (placed alongside the bench) up to 10 people can eat there. Equally, the table can be moved to the redesigned barbecue area next to the house.

In line with Sophie's desire for a calm space, Robinson had the walls painted a dark grey-blue (Dulux Basalt), which he matched with the powdercoating on the garage screen. "Darker walls make the courtyard feel bigger because they allow the boundaries to recede," he says. "Light walls would have been overpowering, because of the amount of sun the garden gets."

For Sophie, the garden is exactly the kind of sanctuary she wanted. "You leave the hustle and bustle up the road, you walk through the house, and then the garden is like a breath of fresh air," she says. "It's just so calming." **10**

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VOLLEY OUTDOOR DINING TABLE AND CHAIRS, AND GOOD ONE STOOLS, ALL TAIT



"I love colour but wanted the outside to be serene, calm and lush, with lots of green"

SOPHIE TRIPPE-SMITH, HOMEOWNER

