



SECRET SANCTUARY

A SYDNEY COUPLE WITNESS THE REVIVAL OF THEIR SMALL GARDEN AS AN IDYLIC AND PRODUCTIVE HIDEAWAY

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DINING AREA At Debbie and Ron's harbourside home, eating out at the teak-and-stainless steel all-weather table and bench seats is truly a joy. "We love having people over and cooking," says Debbie. "We often use the basil from our garden to make a bruschetta." The bench seats can be tucked away under the table when not in use. For similar, try Eco Outdoor's 'Lennox' setting. >

*great idea*

Embrace the splendour of your neighbour's garden - you don't have to out-do them. "A lot of the big trees behind me belong to the neighbours, but we're lucky enough to enjoy them," says Debbie. Enveloped by glorious greenery, this enticing reading spot is difficult for Debbie to resist on a weekend afternoon. Dotted the fence line are fast-growing blechnum silver lady ferns, while a lush vertical carpet of climbing star jasmine provides privacy. "We also have our own lemon tree," she says.

The beauty of Mother Nature in Debbie and Ron's serene 'secret garden' on Sydney's lower North Shore is everywhere. With the CBD just a few kilometres away, this secluded sanctuary is a vision of leafy loveliness. Framed by a stunning bird's-eye view of the nearby bay, the garden faces to the west and features pretty pockets layered with foliage, a roomy paved area that's just right for relaxed alfresco entertaining and even a flourishing, sun-soaked herb garden.

Little wonder that this slice of heaven at the back of their home - a historic freestanding worker's cottage - is their own urban paradise. "It's hard to believe that we're so close to the heart of the city," admits Debbie. "It's so private and almost feels like we're in the middle of a park. Everything in the garden is thriving - it's lovely and green."

The invitingly rustic zone is screened by towering eucalypts and palm trees, however, it wasn't always as gorgeous or functional. "It did have a certain charm to it, but it was a little on the ramshackle side and there was quite a lot of wasted, unusable space," recalls Debbie. "Ron and I are keen gardeners and also love to cook, so we wanted to have an edible aspect to the garden. We thought it would be a real joy to go outside and hand-pick our own herbs for dinner."

Turning to landscape architecture and garden design firm Outdoor Establishments, the couple described their vision for a user-friendly space complete with its own herb garden. The resulting redesign, while retaining some elements, was generated in an expansion of the brick paving to maximise space for relaxation and outdoor dining.

New plantings of trees and shrubs beautifully complement the established foliage, while blocks of heritage Sydney sandstone were sourced and reshaped to construct a raised herb bed. "It is now one of our favourite features of the garden," says Debbie. "The herb bed is so versatile and also looks beautiful, fitting in so well with the setting. And, as we thought, there's nothing like having fresh produce from our own garden to use in our cooking."

"WE'RE NOW USING *every bit of space.* IT'S BEEN TURNED INTO A MORE FUNCTIONAL AND *structured AREA*" ~ DEBBIE, HOMEOWNER



GARDEN BEDS "Outdoor Establishments had the idea of creating a raised herb bed out of recycled sandstone [above left & above right]," says Debbie. "As it's elevated, it's easier on our backs and the wall is a great spot to sit on while we tend to the plants. It also serves as extra seating for guests when we entertain larger groups outside." Matthew Hook from Outdoor Establishments stresses that, in order for a herb or vegetable patch to thrive, it must be positioned in a sunny corner - and this one proves it. "We have so much happening in our herb garden," says Debbie. "There's rocket, parsley, oregano, basil, chilli and thyme, but our pride and joy is the horseradish."

BARWON' ARMCHAIR & FOOTSTOOL (TOP); ECO OUTDOOR



STREET APPEAL First impressions count at Debbie and Ron's 19th-century home. Perfectly in keeping with the elegant abode's traditionally classic facade, the original front verandah plays host to a chic 'Barwon' teak-and-wicker armchair and solid teak 'Airlie' side table from Eco Outdoor, as well as a range of potted agaves and succulents. A graphic cushion from Adam Robinson Design adds a soft element. *Stockists, page 212*

great idea

Let your home's existing strengths inform your garden's redesign. The red clay bricks on the front verandah of this home were mirrored in the backyard's paved area. Extending it was essential to the design, so Outdoor Establishments sourced vintage bricks to blend with the original and used a strip of sandstone pavers to separate them (above opposite).