



HELEN YOUNG

Two to tango

THE MAGIC DANCE BETWEEN A HOUSE AND ITS GARDEN

When a leading architect pushes the boundaries designing his own house, you can bet he will be particular about the garden design to complement it. And so it was in 2015, when the director of CDArchitects, Ziad Chanine, built his ultra-modern home in Sydney's inner west and turned to urban garden designer Adam Robinson to complete his vision.

Robinson is one of a new breed of designers applying interior design principles to exterior spaces. "Sydney is a very cosmopolitan city with cafes, hotels and restaurants that are designed in a high end way, with luxe fit-outs," he says. "We're much more exposed to that considered styling now. When we work so hard and finally get home, we want a lifestyle space that's like a private resort where we can recharge."

Having studied landscape construction and design, horticulture and then interior design, Robinson,

34, now combines all aspects in his work. "It's heartbreaking when you finish a landscape project to see a client put their old furniture back," he says. "Overall styling is just as important as the garden design. It's the icing on the cake and pulls everything together."

Robinson agrees that the smaller the space, the harder it is to design well. "Every wall, nook and corner is



Photography Natalie Hunfalvay



Balance: large planters complement the granite paving



being seen, so every centimetre needs careful consideration." At the Leichhardt house, architect owner Chanine had already chosen his finishes, such as the granite paving. Robinson selected plants, pots and finishing touches and helped choose the furniture. "The brief was open, with no requests about plants or colours," he says, "except that it needed to complement his very distinctive, contemporary architectural style."

Two rectangular, stepped planters separate the house façade from the street. Plants with architectural structure, such as mother-in-law's tongue (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), *Aloe arborescens* and *Zamia furfuracea*, are mixed with soft-textured grasses such as *Zoysia tenuifolia* and *Carex* 'Frosted Curls'. *Carissa* 'Desert Star' provides gentle mounds of green with fragrant, white flowers.

Robinson says of the rooftop terrace: "It was clear it needed

organic-shaped pots that were clean lined. They're mostly white to complement the charcoal grey walls and granite paving, with some greys and textures thrown in for interest." The largest pots, which hold statement frangipanis underplanted with *Correa alba*, are 900mm wide and took four men to carry up the stairs. "It's very hot and exposed up there, so we were extremely selective with the plants," says Robinson.

Adjacent to the swimming pool, a green wall of clumping slender weaver's bamboo provides height for privacy, within a narrow bed. "It's also tall enough to bring the garden into scale with the architecture," Robinson says.

And what does the client think? "The architecture, interiors and landscape all work hand in hand," concludes Ziad Chanine, "with the lush feel of the landscaping counterbalancing the sharp lines of the built form."

Q&A

I've heard propagating succulents is as easy as placing leaves on top of potting mix but this never seems to work. Any suggestions?

Joanna Harrison, Sydney

Some succulents, including some sedums, kalanchoes and echeverias, will grow plants from single leaves. These must have separated cleanly, with an almost sealed end; broken leaves will rot. Other succulents such as agaves, haworthias and some echeverias, grow "pups" or offsets at their base, which you can cut off, often with a few roots attached. Still others, including cotyledons, aeoniums and some echeverias, grow from stem cuttings. Leave cuttings to dry for several days before dusting with sulfur powder and planting. Use coarse, free-draining, cacti and succulent mix for all methods.

My large elm (*Ulmus* 'Picturata') has the dreaded elm leaf beetle. Should I avoid composting the leaves? Is there a remedy to apply next year?

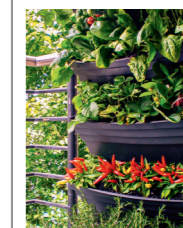
Sandra Ellemor, Melbourne

Friends of the Elms is a not-for-profit group formed to help preserve our threatened elm trees. At friendsoftheelms.com.au you can download a fact sheet detailing integrated strategies to combat this pest, and chemical treatments that must be applied by professionals.

How far from the house should I plant my two Moreton Bay figs? We're on a farm with no neighbours but I'm wary of the invasive roots. Would root barriers help?

Claire Flanagan, Finley, NSW

These mighty trees can span 40 metres, with aggressive roots that damage pavements and house foundations. Expect the roots to spread at least twice the canopy diameter. Root barriers are unlikely to be fully effective over the 100-plus years the trees could live.



Send your questions to: helenyoungtwig@gmail.com or Helen Young, PO Box 3098, Willoughby North, NSW 2068. Website: helenyoung.com.au. The best question for June wins a box of 10 Wallgarden troughs, providing 2 sqm of growing area, worth \$189 from wallgarden.com.au