

SUN, WIND AND SKY

With hardy, textural, sun-loving plants, this rooftop garden thrives even when left to its own devices.

STORY Elizabeth Wilson | PHOTOGRAPHY Sue Stubbs



Garden designer Adam Robinson enjoys the late afternoon light in the rooftop garden he created for Anne and Klaus; the tapestry of plants around him includes sword-leaved Mauritian hemp (*Furcraea foetida*), wheaten-toned *Carex buchananii* and C. 'Frosted Curls', pruned balls of *Westringia*, *Buxus*, *Teucrium* and a fragrant rosemary bush. **OPPOSITE** The path of recycled railway sleepers leads to a water bowl feature. Growing in between the sleepers is a carpet of creeping thyme, which becomes a sea of white flowers in summer.

Sunsets are magical in Klaus and Anne's Sydney rooftop garden. As golden light spills onto their sky-reaching terrace, the grasses light up, the *Melaleuca* tree shines and the city lights twinkle. And when the breeze picks up – as it nearly always does – the whole space ripples and gleams with colour. "There's continual movement in the garden," says Klaus. "It's a very dynamic space and very restful to watch."

This bird's eye location is a dramatic change of scenery for the couple, who downsized four years ago, when they swapped a family home on a 2000m² block in a semi-rural suburb for a fifth-floor apartment in the city. For 15 years, they'd enjoyed a sprawling bushland garden but the empty-nesters were beginning to find the

upkeep burdensome. They set their sights on finding a city pad with some form of outdoor space, so were thrilled to discover this apartment in Sydney's inner west, which includes a rooftop garden in its title. They bought it off-the-plan within an hour of hearing about it.

When they moved in, the rooftop had only the bare bones of a garden. There was one bed with a frangipani and some shrubs, surrounded by paving and an expanse of lawn, which required constant mowing. "I started off using a rotary push lawn mower, then I graduated to an electric one... and then we decided it was time to get rid of the grass," Klaus says. At the same time, Anne wanted guidance in choosing pots to screen out a neighbouring apartment. They decided to consult an expert and Anne sent ▶



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an SOS to garden designer Adam Robinson, whose work she knew and admired. Adam met the couple at the rooftop, and the scope of the garden renovation grew and grew. “Initially, Anne and Klaus sought my help to choose a few pots, but the project escalated to what you see now!” says Adam. “They asked me to come up with a design that was beautiful to look at and could be explored as you walked through. Anne loves gardening so she wanted the opportunity to potter and nurture plants.” It was also important that the garden was easy-care for this travel-keen pair.

The lawn came out and in its place Adam installed an undulating, textural mix of natives, succulents and exotics. “Being an open rooftop means it cops wind and sun from all directions,” says Adam. “So we needed to select sun-loving, water-wise plants and install an irrigation system to ensure the garden would thrive.”

With the existing stone paving in mind, he created a palette of earthy-toned plants. Loosely clipped spheres of Japanese box (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*), silvery germander (*Teucrium fruticans*) and coastal rosemary (*Westringia*) mingle with sword-leaved Mauritian hemp (*Furcraea foetida*) and grasses including *Lomandra* ‘Tanika’ and copper-toned *Carex* (both ‘Frosted Curls’ and *C. buchananii*). Leading through these plantings is a wide

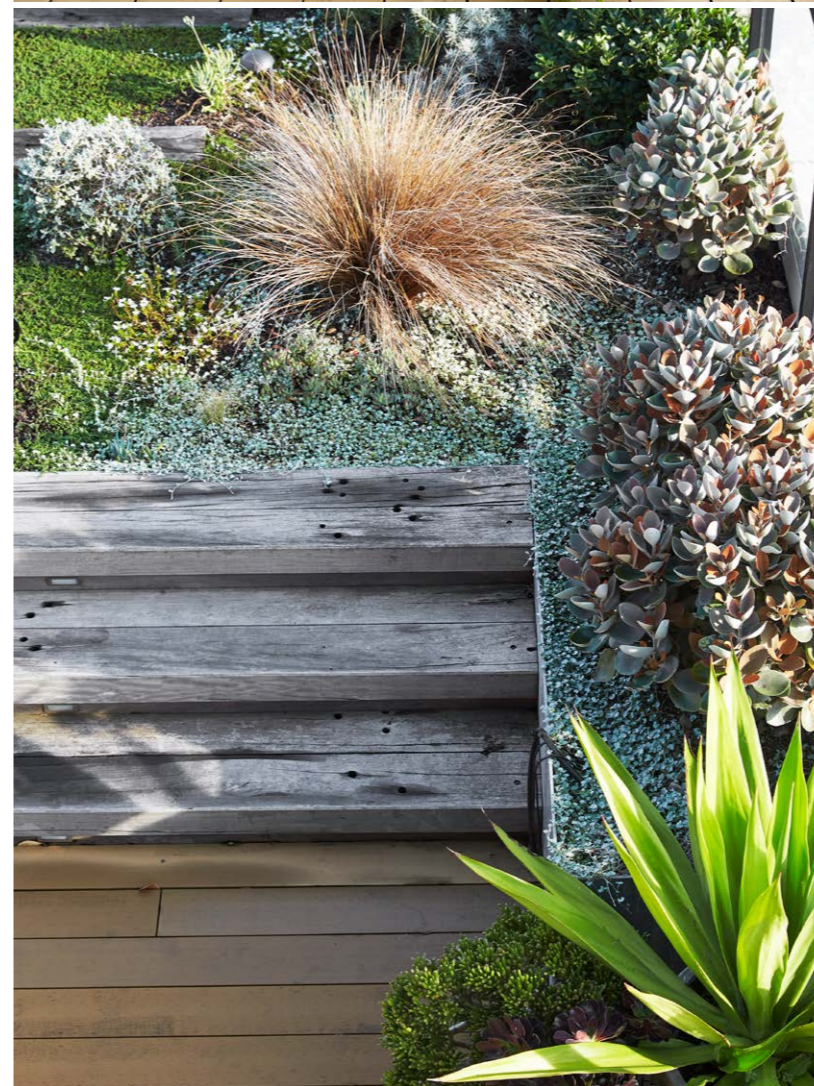
informal path made from recycled railway sleepers, directing the eye to a large water bowl at the end of the path. A carpet of creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum* ‘Albus’) grows between the sleepers, while low hedges of rosemary encircle the water bowl – both adding fragrance to the garden. Taller plantings including a melaleuca tree and a lilly pilly hedge (*Syzygium* ‘Cascade’) grow by the perimeter, along the glass balustrade.

The garden is a focal point for Anne and Klaus’ daily lives. Their living room is glazed on two sides with 9x5m of sliding doors that open onto the rooftop, meaning they’re constantly connected to this space. The alfresco dining area is in regular use and the outdoor sofa is a favourite spot for sunset drinks. “We’re in the space every day,” says Klaus. The couple can still look after the place when they’re out of town thanks to a sophisticated wi-fi controlled watering system. “It’s a lock-up-and-leave garden with irrigation that Klaus can operate from his phone while travelling,” Adam says.

Anne and Klaus love that fact that the garden is a moving, breathing, living microcosm that changes with the seasons. “It’s a kinetic garden,” says Klaus. “Even though it’s not huge, you can still walk around it and have a sense of contentment and peace.” **H&G Adam Robinson Design; www.adamrobinsondesign.com.**

Outdoor diners enjoy prime views of the garden and the skyline beyond. Plants in the original garden bed on the western side of the property (left) have grown and meld beautifully with the new garden. A melaleuca tree (*Melaleuca linariifolia* ‘Snow in Summer’) is the tallest feature.

OPPOSITE Clockwise from top left A trough filled with *Cephalotaxus harringtonia* underplanted with *Rhipsalis* (mistletoe cactus). Clipped *Westringia*, blue chalksticks (*Senecio serpens*), golden *Carex* ‘Frosted Curls’ and strappy *Lomandra* ‘Tanika’ edge the pathway. A Tahitian lime and common sage set against a backdrop of a thriving evergreen bay tree. A row of *Kalanchoe* ‘Copper Spoons’ and *Carex buchananii* sits on a groundcover of *Dichondra* ‘Silver Falls’.



“They have the enjoyment of a garden and the therapeutic benefits of nurturing plants, without the stress of too much maintenance.”
Adam Robinson