

**CAREFULLY CONSIDERED  
PLANTING SOFTENS AND  
COMPLEMENTS THE SHARP  
LINES OF A THOROUGHLY  
MODERN SYDNEY HOME**

# SOFT SPOT

WORDS ROBIN POWELL STYLING ADAM ROBINSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY NATALIE HUNFALVAY

Shapely greenery choices make as strong an impact as the impressive facade of this contemporary home. Hardy *Aloe arborescens* and mother-in-law's tongue are softened by *Carex* 'Frosted Curls' and *Raphiolepis* 'Oriental Pearl'.



**L**ooking back, it was the rooftop terrace that sold it. For architect Ziad Chanine, the 90-square-metre space was irresistible, with its views over the treetops and rooftops of the inner west, toward the dazzle of the Sydney skyline. Ziad used the terrace as the starting point for the design of his dream house, and the result is a confident contemporary building that dominates the space in which it sits.

The landscape design had to complement the architecture; its role was to ground the building on the street; to turn the bare terrace into a friendly space; and to screen and soften the pool area. To make it happen, Ziad turned to landscape designer Adam Robinson. Also trained in interior design, Adam has built a reputation for outdoor spaces that link seamlessly with the buildings they match and the interiors they extend. “The starting point for an outdoor space like this is always the architecture,” he says. “I often find that as garden designers, we are not so much creating as re-creating – pulling the architecture and the interiors outside.”

The key for the large terrace was, as Ziad says, “to soften it without making it fluffy”. Adam paved the area with grey granite tiles and used small clusters of oversized round white pots to break up its rectilinear lines. These were planted with frangipani, and the native *Correa alba*, and matched with slightly smaller pots of *Furcraea*. The large table setting from Cosh Living was matched with upholstered seats for comfort. “It’s important in an outdoor space like this that the furniture looks like it is meant to be outdoors and can develop a bit of an aged look,” says Adam, “rather than being glossy and stark.”

The minimal interventions by Adam have had a major impact. “The terrace is still open,” says Ziad, “but the layering approach that Adam took, with the pots of different sizes, a few plants and the tabletop, means you’re not just looking at an expansive view, but a view framed by the frangipanis and those other elements.”



The pool area (left) is overlooked by the cantilevered balcony that comes off the master bedroom. “The Tribù ‘Mood’ oversized daybed from Cosh Living near the pool (top) is a more versatile option than having a couple of sunloungers,” says landscape designer Adam (pictured opposite). It took four men to carry the big white pots (right) up the stairs to the terrace. A striking frangipani tree is underplanted with *Correa alba* while the broad silvery-grey leaves of *Sansevieria* ‘Moonshine’ contrast with the curved mottled grey planter.

## 5 PLANTS FOR TOUGH SPOTS

When plantlife needs to survive and thrive with minimal maintenance, these tough customers are landscape designer Adam Robinson’s picks

### SILVER TORCH CACTUS

This tough cactus has a rigid vertical form but is covered with short white spines that catch the light and give it a soft, furry look, making it feel comfortable to sit near, unlike other spiky plants.

### SANSEVIERIA ‘SILVER SWORD’

This variety of the tough mother-in-law’s tongue has a lower, broader leaf than the original, with a wash of grey that’s a great match with contemporary architecture.

**FRANGIPANI** Frangipani are reliable in pots, growing slowly so they don’t demand continual pruning. They store water in

their trunk and branches, so they can survive periods of neglect – and then there’s the tree-like form and the gorgeous, fragrant summer flowers.

### ALOE ARBORESCENS

This tall-growing aloe flowers beautifully in winter, has a wonderful form and is extremely tough.

### CARISSA GRANDIFLORA

**‘DESERT STAR’** This variety of the Natal plum fills the same kind of role as buxus, but with a looser, more relaxed appearance. It can form a dense glossy mound to a metre tall and wide, with bursts of beautiful white star-shaped flowers.



## “IRRIGATION WASN’T POSSIBLE ON THE TERRACE SO THE PLANTING HAD TO BE BULLETPROOF”

ADAM ROBINSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

An extendable awning (**below**) offers protection from summer sun, and an undercover nook offers more relaxed seating, an old lounge setting from Domayne. Silver torch cactus, rhipsalis, zamia, *Agave 'Blue Glow'* and sedum lend sculptural appeal. Outside the living area (**right**), tall *Sansevieria stuckyi* contrasts with *Euphorbia 'Diamond Frost'*.

On ground level and backed by a screen of Slender Weaver bamboo, the pool fits sleekly along the side of the house. “The pool was designed as a backdrop to the living space,” says Ziad, “and the bamboo blocks the view of the brick wall next door. We turn the lights on in the evening and the blue glow of the pool really extends the space of the living room. And because the bamboo reaches to the second storey, looking out from the bedroom, you see the bamboo, and hear it whispering in the wind.”

The third element of the landscaping brief was an entry garden. “The aim was to complement the architecture but also to soften it a bit and ground it in the property,” says Adam. He chose a palette of tough plants with a range of forms and textures, from the stiff swords of mother-in-law’s tongues, and firm fronds of zamia, to the soft *Zoysia* grass and fluffy *Carex*.

Ziad has been surprised how successful this part of the landscaping has been, and how welcoming it is to walk into the house through the lush garden. “I’m not a patient person, so we went for mature plants, and it looked beautiful from day one. Now, a year on, it’s just phenomenal – it looks like it’s been there for years.”

In most building and landscaping projects, there is a tinge of regret within the celebration of the new – something that didn’t work out quite as planned, or an opportunity missed. But in this project, says Ziad, everything turned out just the way it should, just as he’d envisaged. “In this house, there’s no component I would go back and change,” he says. “The landscaping and the architecture – everything works really well, hand-in-hand.” **IO** For details on Ziad’s work, visit [cdarchitects.com.au](http://cdarchitects.com.au). For more of Adam’s designs, visit [adamrobinsondesign.com](http://adamrobinsondesign.com). Garden Society installed and maintains the garden – visit [gardensociety.com.au](http://gardensociety.com.au).



**“THIS TABLE HAS A BEAUTIFUL PATINA. THE CHAIR CUSHION FABRICS AND FOAMS ARE FOR OUTDOOR USE, SO CAN BE LEFT IN PLACE 24/7”**

ADAM ROBINSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER