



full circle APPROACH

This Melbourne garden seamlessly blends the traditional with modern appeal. The key to success? Considered planting

WORDS NIGEL BARTLETT PHOTOGRAPHY BEN SCOTT

One of the greatest pleasures for landscape architect Ben Scott is working with a client who loves plants and horticulture as much as he does. That is the case at this home in the Melbourne suburb of Glen Iris: the owner is a keen gardener who wanted a beautifully designed outdoor space that

she could then take over and tend herself. Low maintenance was not her priority. Instead, she was happy to do whatever work was needed to care for the garden and keep it looking its best.

The garden Ben designed is in two distinct parts: a traditional 'cottage' garden at the front that's in keeping with the Edwardian period home, and a more contemporary back courtyard that complements the recent renovation at the rear of the house. They add to a third, separate pool and alfresco entertaining area that the owners – a couple with two grown-up children – completed two years before Ben came on board.

While the two parts Ben designed are quite different, they're linked by a casualness that prevents them being too formal or structured. In the rear courtyard, this takes the form of a woodland feel. The idea here was to create a space that was quiet and introspective. "The courtyard is a contemplative zone, where you can do meditation or yoga, or sit with a coffee or a glass of wine," says Ben. "It's meant to be a relaxing space, where you can just be among the greenery."

He designed a circular timber deck to help create a sense of calm. "I like the purity of the circular form," says Ben. "It's softer on the eye and a bit different to pavers or a rectangular deck. It breaks up the square, linear feel of the house, and I used a pattern with the timber at 45-degree angles to add another level of interest."

A water feature, which Ben also designed, sits next to the deck. The concrete outer shell surrounds a steel lining, over the edges of which the water flows in a contemporary version of traditional Oriental designs. "The water bubbles up gently, adding to the calm atmosphere," he says.

He planted three magnolia trees that will grow to form a canopy over the area. "I love their multi-stemmed, gnarly form and their flowers in late winter when there's nothing else really happening in a garden," says Ben. "It's quite a joy at this time of year."

The trees are complemented by plants including New Zealand rock lily, lentel rose, oak-leaf hydrangea, heuchera and mist flower. Native violets overgrow paved stepping stones, softening their edges. Ben also planted *Acmena* 'Sublime' (a species of lilly pilly) to form hedges that again soften the fences and provide privacy.

Ben kept the furniture deliberately simple, with a round Tait 'Jak' table echoing the circular deck and a pair of butterfly chairs from Melbourne store, Angelucci 20th Century. "The table is quite light in appearance, and the butterfly chairs are a classic design. They're very comfortable and I find the shape, with its curved edges, works well with the decking," he says.

The front garden has an unstructured feel to it, too, but it's filled with herbaceous perennials that create a traditional feel. "It's a casual, free-flowing style of garden that's very pretty and flowery," says Ben. "It cops the northern and western sun, which is why we went with herbaceous perennials that require that full-sun aspect."

These include *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy', Easter daisy, tall verbena, *Salvia* 'Caradonna' and Russian sage, plants that typically burst into bloom in spring and continue flowering all through summer, providing plenty of colour. "There's always something going on during that whole growing season," says Ben.

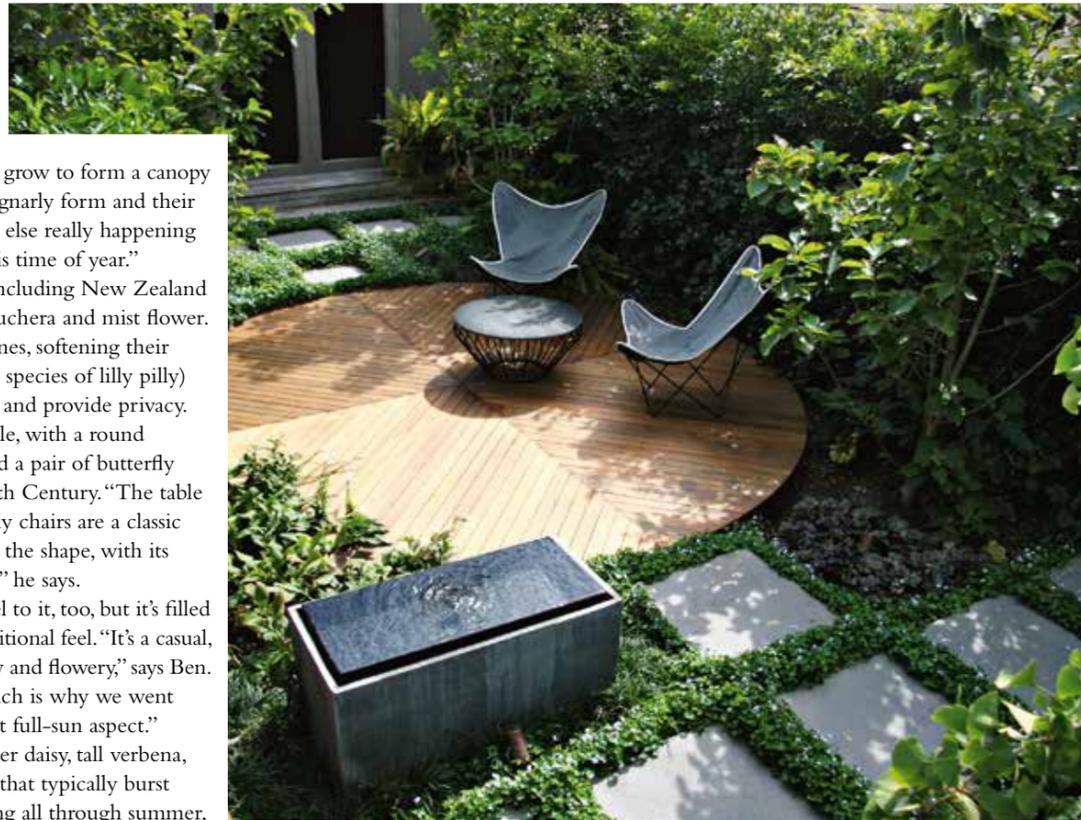
However, they also require hard pruning back in winter, which the owner isn't afraid of. "The garden will be quite bare in the colder months, but there's a lot of beauty in that as well. It's about the seasons and anticipation of what's coming next. You see something pruned and then bang – within six weeks it grows back and flowers all through summer."

Ben also included some ornamental grasses (*Miscanthus* and *Calamagrostis*) to "provide a beautiful contrast with their fine foliage texture against the flowering perennials".

An armillary sphere was chosen as a garden centrepiece to create a focal feature with stepping stone pavers and the perennials planted around it. The stepping stone pavers are made of bluestone and the colour works well with that of the Edwardian house. The driveway pavers are also bluestone, laid out in an ashlar pattern of irregular-sized squares and rectangles. "It's less formal than just straight rectangular or square paving," says Ben.

Despite all the work that went into this garden, Ben didn't find it a chore. "Working with someone who's so passionate about horticulture made this very easy," he says. "We were on the same wavelength, so it was a real pleasure. Knowing she's going to look after the garden well is great, too." 

To find out more about Ben's work, visit benscott.com.au.



As you enter the front garden (**opposite, bottom left**), you're greeted by purple tall verbena. Beneath it, Chinese plumbago is planted as a groundcover and grows among native violet. *Buxus* topiary is in the foreground and the bluestone pathway is laid in an ashlar pattern. In the back courtyard (**opposite, top left**) is a circular deck custom-made in spotted gum timber. A concrete water feature is also custom-made. Bluestone pavers surrounded by native violet visually unite different

rosemary, catmint and iris. Tall verbena is planted opposite. Crab apple (*Malus* 'Sugar Tyne') (**above right**) features in the front garden, as well as an armillary sphere (**below right**) sourced by the owner among pink *Agastache* 'Sweet Lili', ornamental grass *Miscanthus* and the bright red *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'. In front of the bluestone stepping-stone pavers is Rosemary 'Tuscan Blue'. Native violet (**below left**) is the main groundcover in the garden. In the background (**left**), the tall grass *Miscanthus* and the pink *Agastache* 'Sweet Lili' are an ideal foil for the red *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'.



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