

BEAUTIFUL GARDENS

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION FOR STYLISH OUTDOOR LIVING

PHOTOGRAPHY SIMON WHITEHEAD

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Hide & Seek

Tucked away in plain sight, this Sydney garden has been transformed into a secluded paradise for a busy family

Story LISA EASEY Photography SIMON WHITBREAD

HIDDEN HAVEN A wide variety of outdoor 'rooms' that flow on from one another was key to the brief given to Formed Gardens by the family of busy professionals who own this Sydney property. The existing pool was renovated by Stuart Wilson Constructions, paired with a blackbutt timber deck that leads around the cottage to the outdoor lounge. >



Finding a private oasis in the heart of Sydney is rare, yet for the owners of this historic cottage and surrounding garden on the Lower North Shore, it's a daily reality. "This home is a hidden jewel," says Ben Longbottom, partner at Formed Gardens, the landscape design company that completed this project. "Initially what feels like a small, built-up site unfolds to reveal everything a family wants and needs."

For the homeowners, a professional couple with young children, the brief included garden rooms that flow organically around the cottage, such as outdoor terraces, private courtyards and hidden nooks. Almost every corner invites exploration, a striking contrast from how the property looked a few years ago. "The heritage home badly needed restoration to be brought up to speed for modern life," says Ben. "The dark and disconnected garden areas were transformed into inviting, functional and beautiful spaces that draw you out into the landscape."

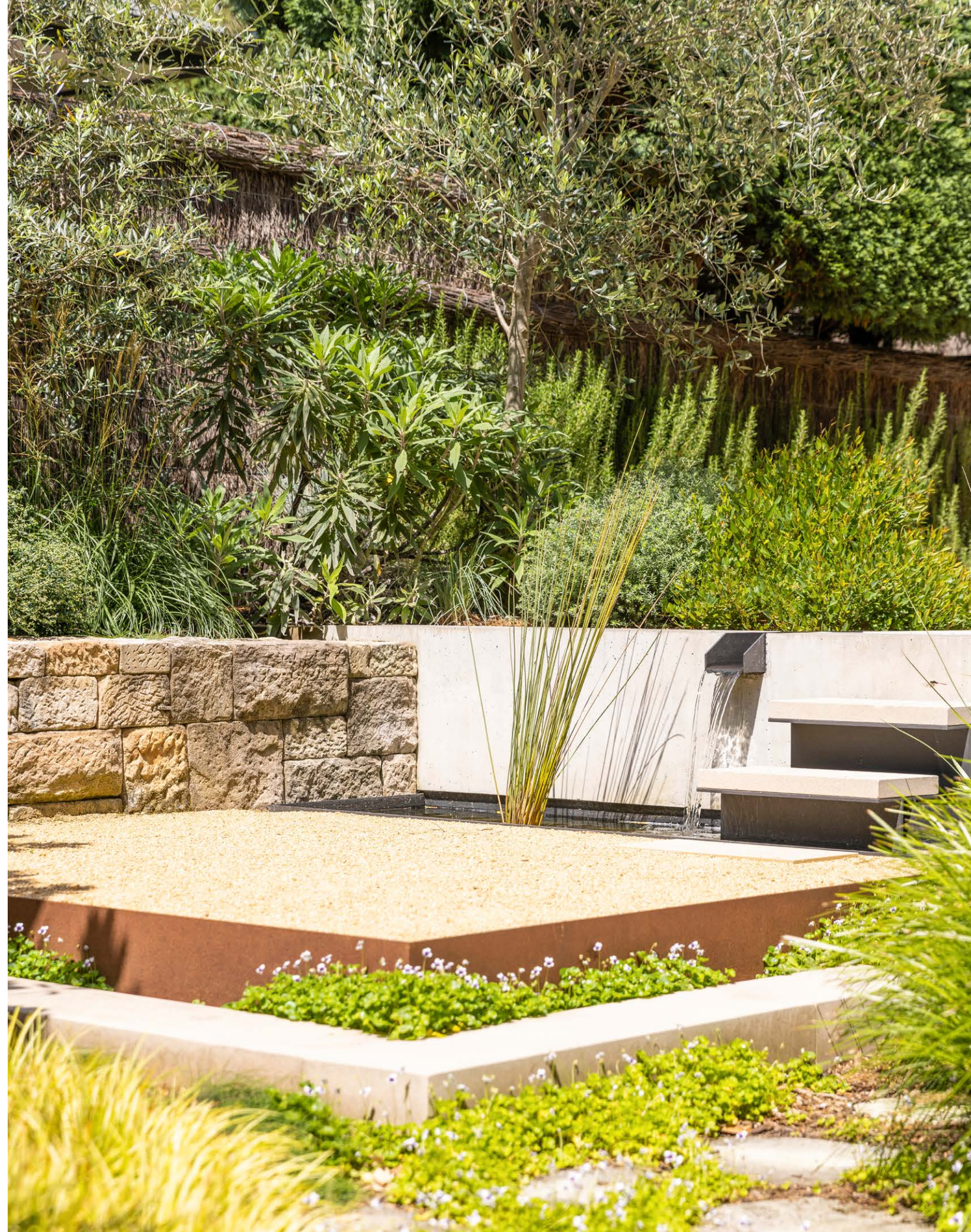
"A COMMON THEME IN OUR WORK IS THE GENTLE TENSION BETWEEN THE HARDSCAPE PALETTE AND PLANTINGS" BEN LONGBOTTOM

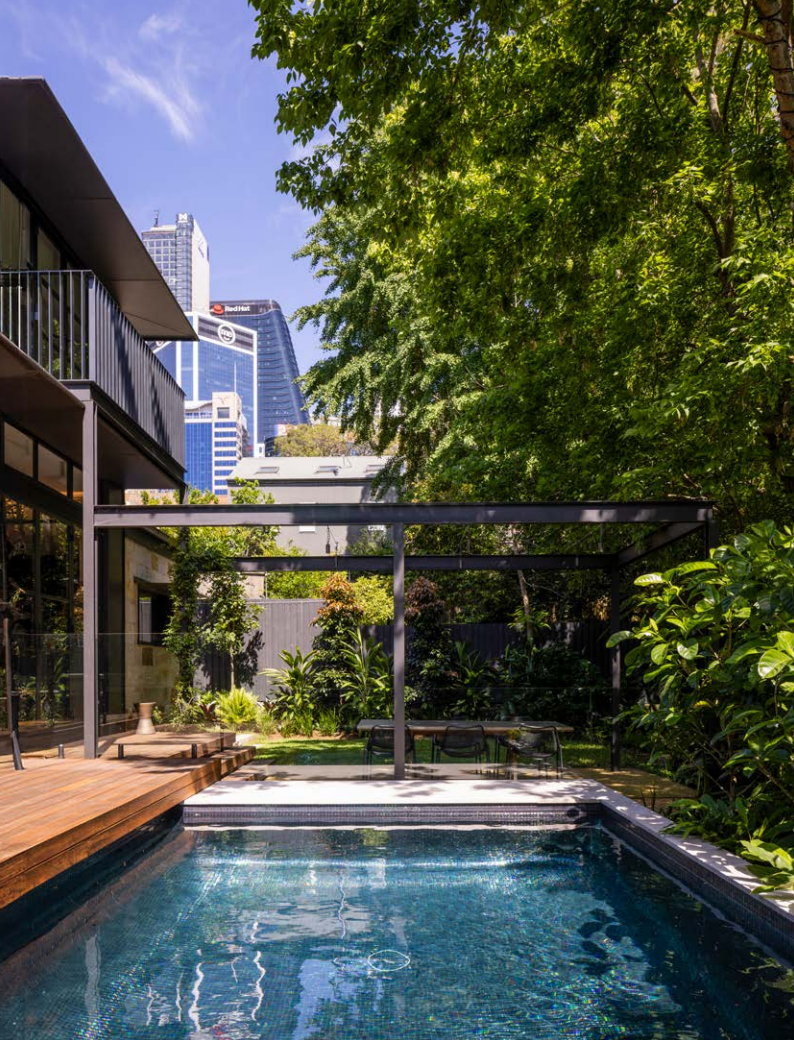
HOT SPOT The front garden features dry-tolerant olive trees (above), guiding visitors along the Aren Bianco limestone pavers from Onsite for a warm welcome. With the full force of the sun directed here, it was important to choose plants suited to the unique microclimate (opposite), such as bushels of coastal rosemary. "Once the home's aspect and microclimate are understood then colour, seasonal display, form and texture all factor into the plant selection," says Ben. >





PLAY TIME Lush planting creates an almost hidden path to the chess set, from Australian Chess Enterprises. The broad burgundy leaves of a ‘Forest Pansy’ tree add a splash of colour in the garden beds beside hardy elephant ears, oakleaf hydrangea and Lomandra ‘Lime Tuff’ (top left). **WATER WORKS** The custom-designed water feature by Formed Gardens, Jaytech Industries and Stuart Wilson Constructions, adds modernity to the garden (top right & opposite). The rill, situated alongside the entry, flows water off the concrete wall into a pond at the courtyard level, surrounded by Echimium candicans, Miscanthus ‘Adagio’ and other dwarf shrubs and grasses. With sustainability in mind, sandstone salvaged from the property was hand-carved into the seating wall. Floating steps made from steel plinths, topped with Aren Bianco limestone, create an elegant pathway back to the entrance. **TICKLED PINK** Anigozanthus ‘Bush Pearl’ grows beneath an olive tree, near rosemary and hardenbergia (bottom). >





“I LOVE THE SENSE OF WILDNESS THAT THE RIGHT PLANTING SCHEME CAN BRING TO A GARDEN”

BEN LONGBOTTOM

The owners enlisted the expertise of Formed Gardens along with Bijl Architecture, Stuart Wilson Constructions and Melissa Wilson Landscape Architects, to refresh the site. It took two years and a significant amount of hard work, but the renovation was completed in 2022, and the results proved to be well worth the wait.

A stroll down the driveway, lined with weathered brushwood, reveals the charming sandstone home edged with butterfly bush, Mexican lily and coastal rosemary. Varieties of hardy native Australian and Mediterranean plants were the perfect choice to bask in the full sun at the front of the property. A water rill, elegantly flowing beside the entrance, joins a pond and courtyard for a calming respite.

Even from this aspect, yet another hidden nook comes into view, in the form of a giant chess set playfully emerging from a backdrop of evergreen grasses. This was a special request from the owners. Made from sandstone and granite to complement the natural materials of the home, the board sits among gatherings of Lomandra ‘Lime Tuff’, Kentia palms and native violet. It’s a lush prelude to the back of the property where shade-loving plants flourish.

With the nearby tree canopy, including a graceful box elder, casting shade, tropical varieties were the go-to choice. Broad-leaved palm lilies, Ctenanthe ‘Silver Star’ and prickly rasp ferns sit beside the pool and dining terrace, framed by a custom steel arbour. Keeping with the home’s heritage, a hardscape of granite, limestone and sandstone was used across the property along with modern industrial elements such as corten steel. “We love sandstone, particularly recycled or salvaged. It’s very ‘of place’ in Sydney,” says Ben.

On warm days, the newly renovated pool is perfect, while the lounge area, tucked beneath the awning, is where the family unwinds. Yet, the garden’s success comes down to a feeling. “It’s the sense of balance and sanctuary the gardens provide that the owners love the most,” says Ben.

SOURCE BOOK

Landscape build: Formed Gardens, formedgardens.com.au.

Landscape architecture: Melissa Wilson Landscape Architects, melissawilson.com.au.

Architecture and interior design: Bijl Architecture, bijlarchitecture.com.au.

Builder: Stuart Wilson Constructions, stuartwilsonconstructions.com.



SUMMER MEALS A custom steel arbour by Jaytech Industries and Stuart Wilson Constructions frames the dining terrace, set with a Robert Plumb scissor dining table in New Guinean rosewood and topped with Artetech Essenza Cenere porcelain (above). A bower plant climbing the arbour, once established, will integrate the steel in the tropical landscape. **COOL CENTREPIECE** With the alfresco dining on one side and the alfresco living area on the other, the pool (opposite) is a focal point which can be enjoyed from many vantages. It was in need of an update, which included Aren Bianco limestone coping. Plantings of Ctenanthe ‘silver star’ and Cordyline petiolaris surround the space. **HB**