



# LANDSCAPING YOUR GARDEN

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# THE PERFECT *plan*





For the owners of this Melbourne property, the outdoor area played a significant part in the look, feel and overall construction of the home. Luckily, landscape designer Scott Brown was ready to take on the task of creating the perfect outdoor space before, during and after the construction of the house.

PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK REDMOND





## THE BRIEF

The homeowners, Harold and Maureen, wanted a pool and spa for their young family and guests to enjoy, as well as a multipurpose entertaining area for barbecuing and outdoor dining, beautiful views out to the garden from inside, and the right amount of light being allowed into the home during winter. In addition, the garden/outdoor areas needed to be very low maintenance and drought tolerant, due to the family's busy lifestyle. Having designed an outdoor area for Harold and Maureen before, there was a lot that didn't need to be said as we knew each other well enough to have a strong sense of trust.

I wanted the outdoor environment to complement the home, so the aim was to create a seamless blend of house and garden, especially because of the predominance of large windows along the rear and side of the house. The outdoor area also needed to be highly useful and relate to the home's established style.

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

In designing and positioning the pool as part of the overall landscape design, the level of the structure had to be carefully considered to ensure the pool could be easily accessed and also viewed from inside the home. On a sloping block where the pool is often below the home, as in this case, it's important to minimise the difference in height between the pool and home so they still relate to each other.

This pool environment would not be anywhere near as inviting if there was too much of a height difference between them. From inside the home, one must feel connected to the pool, as if it was part of the same theme. A significant flight of stairs down to a pool below would disconnect the two parts, making it less inviting. As it is, the small height difference adds interest and yet we don't feel isolated whether we are in the water, on the paving or in the house.

Another design consideration is the creek bed. A







dominant and unifying feature of the design, the creek bed runs the entire side of the home and glimpses of it can be snatched from most of the rooms on the ground floor.

Outside the main bedroom and front entry, the water bubbling over the feature rock is simply recycled through a grate beneath the rock and surrounding pebbles via a sump pump. At the lower end of the creek bed near the pool, water is pumped out of the pool to a position two metres up the slope and this runs down the rocks and back into the pool. The perception for those walking through the house, sitting inside, or even swimming in the pool or spa, is that the water originates from the feature rock near the main bedroom and runs the entire length to the pool.

In reality, this would involve a lot of water loss due to evaporation. Instead, by seeing the running water at each end, and viewing the creek-bed rocks along the side of the home, the continual flow is an illusion, minimising the evaporation but allowing the creek bed to become a unifying feature, which extends the entire length of the home, linking the entrance hall, main bedroom and all other rooms looking onto it with the backyard, the pool, the entertaining area and spa that overlooks it.

At night the trickling water is a stunning focal point, yet it's a feature that looks great regardless of where or when you are viewing it.

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE







## THE PROJECT

Because my involvement in this project commenced before the house plans were finished, the design formed the most crucial part of the process as this enabled all the requirements to be identified and detailed. From here, a flow chart or installation timeline was detailed, which enabled each element to be constructed at the critical time in order to fit in with the other constraints and construction elements of the project – especially the building of the house itself! This meant a significant saving on costs as duplication of labour was minimised. In some cases, such as the pool and creek bed, it would not have been possible to have the feature implemented after the house was completed, due to prohibitive cost or access.

The front of the home faces west, so ornamental pear trees (*Pyrus ussuriensis*) were used to provide shade and cooling from the hot summer sun, while allowing warmth in winter as the trees are deciduous and lose their leaves at this time.

The front garden is dominated by the use of river pebbles instead of a front lawn, with the greenery being supplied by the pear trees and by using a ground-covering conifer (*Juniperus conferta*) to spread over all the garden beds. This is prickly and keeps dogs and birds off the beds, minimising maintenance. The groundcover also reduces moisture loss from the soil which makes this garden very drought tolerant.







## LANDSCAPE PROFILE



Some New Zealand dwarf flaxes (*Phormium sp.*) and dwarf Japanese bamboo (*Nandina domestica* 'Nana') bring interest without adding too much to the water requirements of the garden. The northern fence line of the backyard is lined with deciduous trees such as columnar birches (*Betula pendula* 'Fastigiata') and Manchurian pears (*Pyrus ussuriensis*). These trees provide shade from the hot summer sun and allow the winter sunlight to flood into the yard and the house.

Most other species used are extremely drought hardy, including a feature tree outside the main bedroom from South Africa (*Robinia* 'Frisia'). Succulents like yuccas and agaves complete the architecturally modern look while continuing the drought-tolerant theme.

The pool design has a raised wall along one side to protect the trees from the water splash. The pavers and wall cladding have been chosen to match and complement the home and also withstand the constant wet/dry of chlorinated water from the pool. The cladding on the spa and pool wall is limestone and matches the rear wall of the house.

The pavers are grey concrete, which cuts down the amount of sun glare and ensures the paving does not dominate the views of the garden. The interior design of the pool is unusual in that I designed the two ends to be shallow complete with a 'swimout' area, while the middle of the pool is the deepest – right where the kids jump from the raised spa!







## HOW WE DID IT

The pool was built first, then the house slab was constructed, before the creek bed boulders were lowered into place. Then the house construction commenced and the rear patio concrete and retaining wall was built. House construction continued, with electrical, gas and water infrastructure, including drainage provision, being implemented as appropriate in conjunction with the house services.

During the later stages of the house being built, the pool work recommenced, as did the paving and other elements of landscape construction. Irrigation, soil preparation, drainage, planting and light fittings, as well as ground surface treatments, only began following completion of the house.

## CHALLENGES

The entire garden and pool was designed, documented and tendered before the house was built. The pool had to be constructed before the house due to a lack of access afterwards. This meant that, on a sloping block, the design had to have every detail and level selected and specified so as the house was being built the landscape infrastructure could be effectively installed before the home was completed and access was prohibited.

For example, the pool and spa were constructed before the house, and the spa was originally 1.5 metres out of the ground, on a vacant block of land. Also, the rocks


for the creek bed running down to the pool had to be selected and installed after the house slab was poured, but before the house brickwork was started. This was because a front-end loader was needed to crane the rocks in over the house slab and place them accordingly. Also, all the electrical cabling for the pool equipment and garden lighting and the gas for the pool heater had to be planned and integrated within the house infrastructure and circuitry, while the house was being built. The slabs for the rear entertaining pavement area had to be poured during the house construction and the structure had to be connected to the spa and the house slab for stability.

## MAINTENANCE

The maintenance for this garden is very minimal, but in order to achieve this an enormous amount of planning was involved. The garden and pool are virtually independent of the main water supply, and the plants thrive on Melbourne's natural rainfall, while the pool overflow is collected, stored and returned to the pool. The trees along the fence line and at the front of the property are trimmed and shaped professionally once a year. Raking up and collecting the leaves each autumn and a little bit of trimming three or four times a year are all there is to looking after this environment. The paving has been sealed with an impregnating sealer so no real cleaning is required. The pool is self-cleaning and automatically chlorinated.







*“At night the trickling water is a stunning focal point, yet it’s a feature that looks great regardless of where or when you are viewing it.”*

## RESULT

The outdoor spaces are interesting and also stunning any time of the year. Because the views of the garden/pool/entertaining area are significant from anywhere in the home, it is important to ensure that the garden looks its best, even in winter when it’s not being used, as the family looks out onto it all year round.

Apart from the overall cohesiveness between house and garden, the role the landscape plays in climate control for the home is fantastic. In summer, the trees along the north of the yard provide shade to the ground-floor rooms. This means there is no need for blinds or awnings and the views of the pool and garden can be enjoyed day and night. In winter the trees lose their leaves and the winter sunlight floods through the empty branches, warming up the ground level of the home,

which still enjoys uninterrupted views of the pool and garden. Overall, I designed this garden and landscape to complement the modern style of the home while ensuring the design is not too modern. The result is a garden and outdoor environment that won’t date.

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