

Courtyard Garden a waterwise environment

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This entertainment courtyard and swimming pool lies within a larger site which includes a tennis court and surrounding garden beds.

The client's brief was to create a useable space for entertaining, and to ensure that both the existing pool and the new courtyard and gardens were as waterwise as possible.

Hand watering of the existing garden was becoming a problem as Stephen and Debbie are both very busy. They were also keen to 'do the right thing' in terms of water conservation.

This motivation has reaped benefits on a number of levels. They now have an outdoor environment which is relatively self sufficient in terms of watering (pool and garden), and from a personal viewpoint, the time and money invested in their outdoor environment is not jeopardised by Melbourne's current water restrictions, nor by the possibility of harsher restrictions being implemented. Moreover, it has been important to both Stephen and Debbie to be able to have their new outdoor entertaining environment whilst being responsible in regard to our climate, our water resources, and the prospect of further drought and climate change.

The original space between the pool and the home was dominated by overgrown shrubs and small trees, and three bangalow palms which were mostly hidden from view. The pool could not be seen from the house.

By opening this space up, a visual link between the pool and the home was achieved. The courtyard design called for a combination of paving mediums. The pavers are sandblasted concrete (Anston), and the dark grey colour complements the house colour scheme. To prevent the courtyard getting too hot in summer, the grey pavers are married with synthetic timber decking (Modwood). The decking colour complements the grey paving, and provides heat relief to the courtyard. The artificial decking is made from plastic fused with natural wood fibres and requires no oiling, or painting, and will not rot or deteriorate. This represents savings in maintenance time as well as costs.

The existing bangalow palms have been supplemented by other specimens sourced locally. These provide height to relate to the two storey home, as well as subtle shade during summer, without obscuring the view or wasting space at ground level which is needed for entertaining a crowd. They are also surprisingly hardy, once established.

The existing grey paving around the pool and spa has been retained as it is structurally sound and we have been able to incorporate it into the overall design by using grey pavers nearby (but not touching!).

The construction of the timber feature screen creates a uniform backdrop, as well as providing a screen for the water tanks, and pool equipment.

Planting in front of the screen, around the pool consists of Yucca elephantipes, with massed plantings of Dianella. These plants are especially hardy and their sharp foliage looks great reflected in the water, and silhouetted against the screen.

River pebbles have been used as the garden mulch for several important reasons. The colour spectrum of the pebbles matches the colours of the built elements present in this outdoor environment. The grey relates to the pavers, the yellow relates to the house render, and the reds relate to the decking. This creates a sense that the pebbles 'belong' and they in turn tie the other elements together.

The pebbles hold the soil so that birds and the wind do not continue to tip soil into the pool as was the case prior to introduction of the pebbles. The large size of the pebbles also enables debris to be raked or 'blown' from the garden beds with relative ease.

The original, metallic pool fence has been replaced with a semi-frameless glass one, which is supported with mat black posts. This minimises the visual intrusion of the fence.

The pool has a cover fitted, which can be rolled back and removed in twenty seconds by using a motorized roller (Remco). This means that evaporation of water from the pool is effectively reduced by more than 90%, whilst the disruption to its' use and enjoyment is minimized. The cover allows rain water to fall through small holes into the pool, whilst preventing debris and leaves etc from getting into the pool.

The pool and garden is serviced by several other crucial waterwise elements.

The specimen lawn, which provides the family dog with some underfoot comfort as well as a toilet, is actually synthetic turf. This requires no watering or mowing and remains green and surprisingly realistic all year round.

There are two 9000 litre rain water tanks which are connected to the rear roof of the house and are hidden behind the pool screen fence at one end of the pool. These tanks are further boosted with a small, slimline tank down the blind side of the house. This tank collects the water from almost half the house roof space, and has a submersible sump pump in it to pump the water to the two main holding tanks. This exercise has proven much more cost effective than having the entire house roof and guttering replumbed, and if the blind side of the house roof was ignored we would be missing out on half the rainfall runoff from the roof.

The main tanks are connected to the garden irrigation drip system via a 'water switch' which takes water from the tanks and then switches automatically to the mains water supply as the water level in the tanks gets too low. There is also a tap which can be used to use tank water to top up the pool as needed.

Another crucial element in this garden's waterwise arsenal is a cartridge filter which is connected on by-pass in the pool filtration system. This enables the pool filter to be 'backwashed', through the cartridge, with the clean water flowing back into the pool instead of (the usually dirty water) down the sewer as is usually the case. This can save a significant amount of water during the course of a year's pool maintenance.

Interestingly, this entertainment courtyard and its swimming pool and spa do not necessarily look as though their aesthetic appeal has been hampered by the basic requirement to ensure they are waterwise.

When thinking about drought tolerant gardens and outdoor environments, some people tend to envisage savage, harsh and uninviting environments.

This space is quite unique. It is a welcoming and attractive outdoor environment, which complements the family's lifestyle. It provides a very useful space for entertaining, dining and recreation, as well as space for the dog. It also provides a stunning outlook from inside the home at night as well as during the day, regardless of the weather or the time of year.