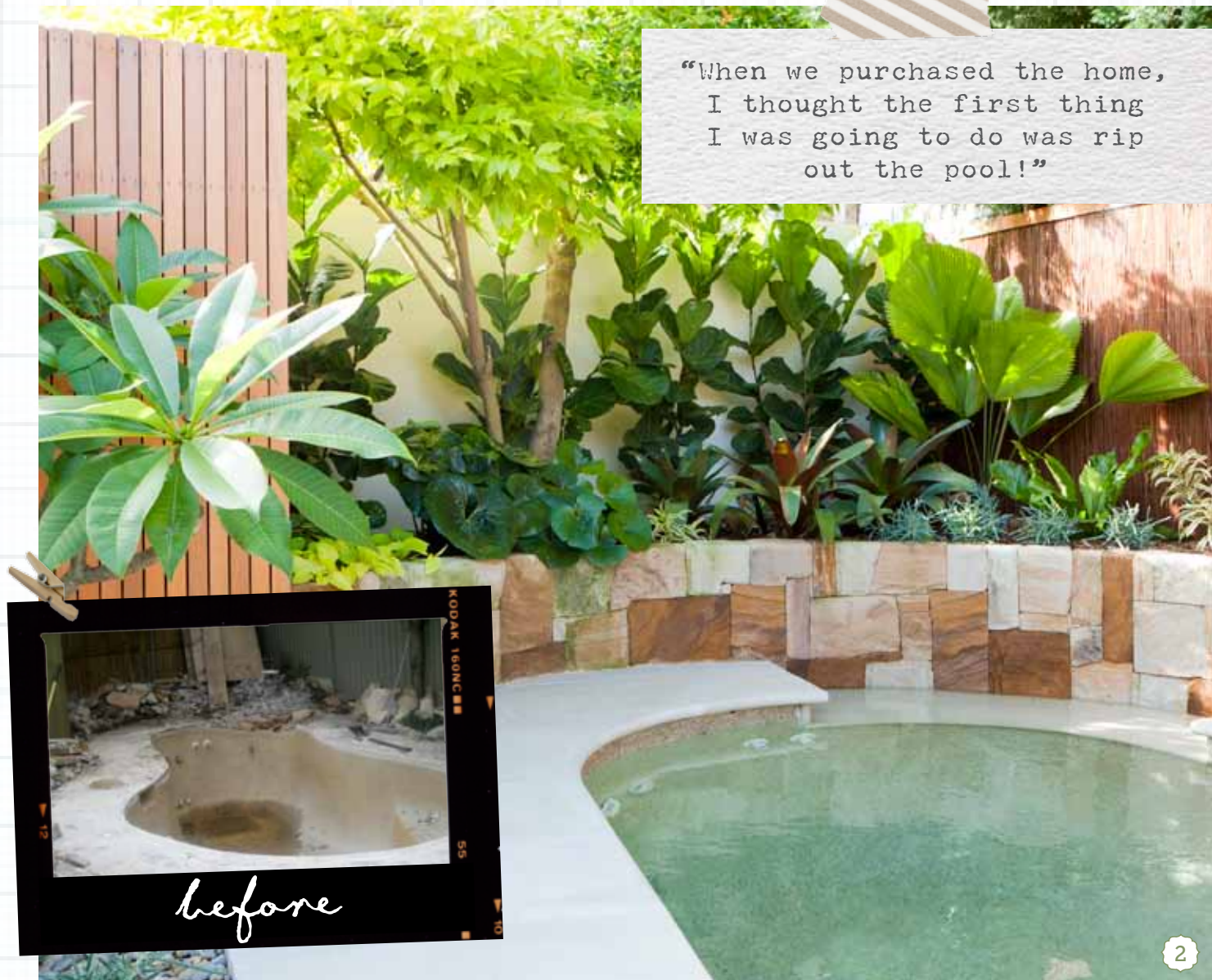


outdoor  
OASIS

A SMALL SYDNEY BACKYARD HAD TO DELIVER A PLAY AREA, PLENTY OF PLANTS AND AN ENTERTAINING SPOT – AND SUCCEEDS ON ALL FRONTS

WORDS JANE PARBURY STYLING HELEN ADAMS  
PHOTOGRAPHY SUE STUBBS



“When we purchased the home, I thought the first thing I was going to do was rip out the pool!”



**ANDREW HAD PLENTY** of ideas about what to do with the “dumping ground” of a backyard he was faced with in the recently acquired Sydney semi he shares with his wife Adriana and their two daughters, Annabella, nine, and Rosie, three. They wanted pockets of lush greenery, a play area and a space for entertaining, plus there was a small, neglected swimming pool to work around. The only challenge would be fitting everything into the garden’s diminutive proportions. Fortunately, Andrew’s day job as a landscaper for Smart Landscaping Solutions meant solving such difficulties was a cinch.

The new garden delivers on all fronts. An expansive merbau deck is the perfect spot for children’s games and entertaining, while the raised area beyond is home to the refurbished pool and exotic plantings that give the space a resort feel. Less attractive elements, such as an existing shed and dilapidated fencing, have either been replaced or cleverly screened away, and the tiny scrap of exhausted lawn has been sacrificed for pavers from Eco Outdoor.

That’s not to say that vegetation doesn’t feature – quite the opposite. Existing mature greenery, supplied by cordylines and ferns, has been supplemented with a mix of easy-care plantings and sculptural pots that deliver hits of green throughout the space. The whole garden now feels lighter, brighter and more spacious than its previous incarnation, proving that clever ideas can make even a small space punch well above its weight.

Andrew Donnola of Smart Landscaping Solutions, call 0417 788 983.

**1 WOOD WORKS** Andrew chose merbau for the decking. It needs frequent maintenance to retain its reddish hue, but here, it is being allowed to weather to a natural silver. “I didn’t want it to look pristine and to continually maintain it,” Andrew says. “We are on a north aspect here and it gets sun 24/7, so you’d be doing it every three months! I wanted the area to have that natural feel, with the rust, the natural silvering of the decking and the composition of the garden.” The original steel shed, now veneered in brickwork and clad in cedar batons, is an attractive storage area for the pool equipment and toys.

**2 SWIMMING SENSATION** The existing pool, with its uneven ‘crazy paving’, was also ready for a makeover. Andrew ripped the paving out, concreted around the perimeter and relaid the whole area with cement-based pavers. He built a dwarf retaining wall behind it that now holds in place a raised garden bed, fronting it with cladding made from reclaimed sandstone. The original pebblecrete pool shell stayed. “Since refurbishing it, I couldn’t imagine any other finish,” says Andrew.

The existing duranta tree in the back garden has been underplanted with a mix of ficus lyrata, prince of orange, philodendrons as ground cover and bromeliads. “The bronze tones of the underfoliage pick up on the sandstone,” says Andrew. >





Less attractive elements, such as dilapidated fencing, have either been replaced or cleverly screened away

### 3 RAIN MAKER

In the narrow side entry, an outdoor shower – put in so the family can rinse off after dips in the pool or beach visits – and rain run-off drain into an irrigation line that feeds the garden beds set along the fence line. Andrew also reworked the plantings, retaining some statement greenery, taking cuttings from the existing cordylines and planting them on. Adding birds of paradise and *Philodendron* 'Xanadu' extended the tropical feel.

### 4 PLANTING TRICKS

A rendered wall replaced the original timber fence and provides a backdrop to a narrow bed that has been planted with tall tiger grass, and mulched with a variety of Nepean river pebbles from Australian Native Landscapes. Andrew chose tiger grass rather than a smaller-leaf plant for ease of maintenance. "With tiger grass, the drop's minimal, and when it does drop it's a broad leaf you can pick up with your hand," he says. "What can happen with the smaller foliage bamboos is shedding throughout the year, and the only way to maintain the garden is to bring out the vacuum cleaner and vacuum the rockery!"

## BUDGET BREAKDOWN

### BACK GARDEN

Frameless pool fence: Sydney Frameless Glass.....	\$4800
Merbau decking: Including excavation & construction, Wayne's World Timber & Building Supplies.....	\$17,250
Nepean river pebbles: Australian Native Landscapes.....	\$205
Planters: \$80 each, Pottery Shack.....	\$560
Plants.....	\$15,800
Pool pavers: 'Etch' pavers in Cashmere, \$78/sqm plus preparation, Eco Outdoor.....	\$11,700
Rendered blueboard fencing.....	\$5300
Sandstone ballast wall: Gosford Quarries.....	\$5040
Screen: 'Circles' screen, Laser Cut Screens.....	\$1100
Stockists, page 244	

Cost: \$61,755\* (including labour)

\* SOME COSTS ARE BASED ON OWNERS' ESTIMATES AND WILL VARY. ARCHITECTURAL PLANS & COUNCIL FEES NOT INCLUDED



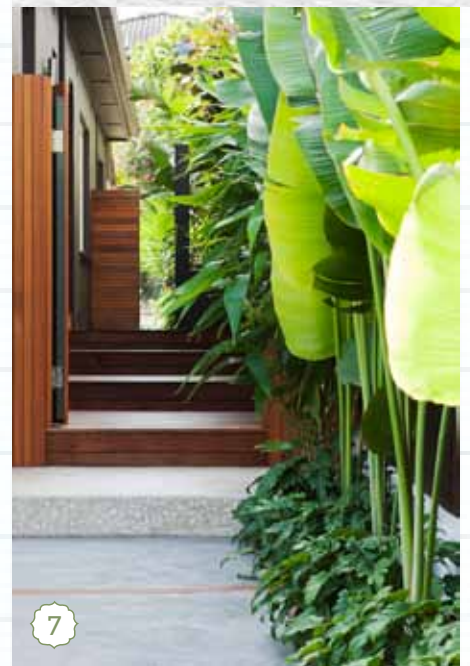
### 5 STYLISH SCREENING

A decorative rusted-metal screen from Laser Cut Screens is set into a chocolate-coloured rendered wall with an orange-painted backdrop. It gives the garden a dramatic focus, especially at night when shadows are cast across the space. A bank of long planters runs right along the base. "Framing in white pots allows the chocolate brown and rust to stand out," says Andrew. >





“I saw the idea for the panelled driveway in Spain; the timber frames also act as expansion joints”



## 6 FRONTING UP

The revamped front driveway is a blend of poured concrete and oiled hardwood framing. “I saw this idea in Spain – concrete bordered in a pebble mosaic,” says Andrew. “I thought the timber would have a similar effect, but would also act as expansion joints to reduce the chance of the concrete fracturing.” A mass planting of *Pennisetum advena* ‘Rubrum’ on the nature strip has a softening effect.

## 7 SIDE ISSUES

The stepped side entry combines a custom-mixed slab of concrete blended with cowra pebbles as a terrazzo effect, and merbau decking. “It doesn’t get as much sun here so will retain its natural oil colour,” says Andrew. The boiler, half way up, has been screened off with tongue-and-groove panelling. “When you walk up, it’s just another feature that softens up the entry,” says Andrew.

## BUDGET BREAKDOWN

### FRONT ENTRY

Excavation.....	\$2500
Side decking: Wayne’s World Timber & Building Supplies.....	\$14,840
Concrete and timber panelled driveway.....	\$8200
Concrete landing with terrazzo feature.....	\$2500
Plants.....	\$1800
Stockists, page 244	

Cost: \$29,840\* (including labour)