

GARDEN MAKEOVER

COURTYARD OASIS

A small outdoor space is often a big design challenge. Here's how one landscaper pushed the boundaries in his backyard to create a leafy sanctuary.

Despite being just six metres wide by 10 metres deep, this suburban courtyard is a beautiful and practical space. Landscape designer Andrew Donnola, from Sydney's Smart Landscaping Solutions, explains how he turned this tiny, formerly neglected courtyard into a serene after-hours retreat cum open-air office – and as a result, pushed up the sale price of his North Bondi home.

DESIGN BRIEF

When you have minimal room at your disposal, the first step is to figure out what is essential and design with that in mind. Andrew wanted a place where he could host barbecues, but he also needed a 'living' advertisement for his landscaping business – a place where he could meet clients and discuss their plans, while around them, his work spoke quietly for itself.



ANDREW DONNOLA
LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

"Not only was I the designer of this project, I was the banker, builder and labourer. Because I did all the work myself I could afford to spend

more on materials, and I could adapt the design as I went along. It was immensely satisfying to have installed every aspect of the job – from the plants to the pavers, blockwork, timber cladding and the construction of the water feature."

OPPOSITE Cushions from Cloth. Metal hoop art, porcelain stool and potted succulents from The Urban Balcony.
For Where to Buy, see page 268.

PERIMETER PLANTING

By concentrating the planting at the garden's boundary, the centre of the courtyard is freed up so people can easily congregate. The benchseat doubles as a daybed.



PRIVACY SCREENING

The lush green foliage of the next-door neighbour's bungalow palms and *Dracaena marginata* provide privacy while visually extending the boundary. "Always take advantage of other people's plantings," says Andrew.

TRICKS WITH TIMBER

Canadian cedar fencing adds colour and texture, while the planks' horizontal placement makes the wall appear longer. The timberwork continues onto the bench seat while the studio is vertically clad to add dimension to the space. Although it is a relatively expensive timber, at about \$6/m, Andrew chose cedar because it's the only wood that doesn't bleed. "Often you'll have a beautiful sandstone wall and next to it you'll have timber posts. When it rains, they stain the stone," he says.

PAVING THE WAY

Eco-Stone pavers from Eco Concepts are made of reconstituted aggregate. Their pale tone acts as a soothing counterpoint to the courtyard's warm hues and varied textures. "I could have decked the whole area but it would have felt like you were in a sauna," says Andrew. >





Before

BEFORE AND AFTER

Andrew's courtyard was once little more than a dumping ground for recycled house bricks and construction materials left over from landscaping projects he'd worked on. "It wasn't the most pleasant place to spend time," he says, "but when it was finished we used it often."

He is convinced the garden was a major factor in his two-bedroom home, set on 189m², selling for a whopping \$1.3 million recently. It just goes to show what a little work (and a lot of skill) can do for you.

OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM

TOP LEFT The 2.7x2.4m studio was built at the rear of the courtyard so Andrew could keep his work and home life separate. The roof is flat to comply with council height regulations. A 3.2m-high honed-granite water feature was installed between the bench seat and the *Elaeocarpus* planter box. The front yard reflects the courtyard, with horizontal cedar cladding, bordered by *Ctenanthe* and paved in bush-hammered granite. Andrew rendered a fence around an old melaleuca tree, then lined it with bamboo and pebbles.

Planting guide

VERTICAL GROWTH

"There are two rectangular tubs within one big planter box here, as all of the plants require different amounts of water," says Andrew. "Both tubs are on drip irrigation."

NEW HEIGHTS

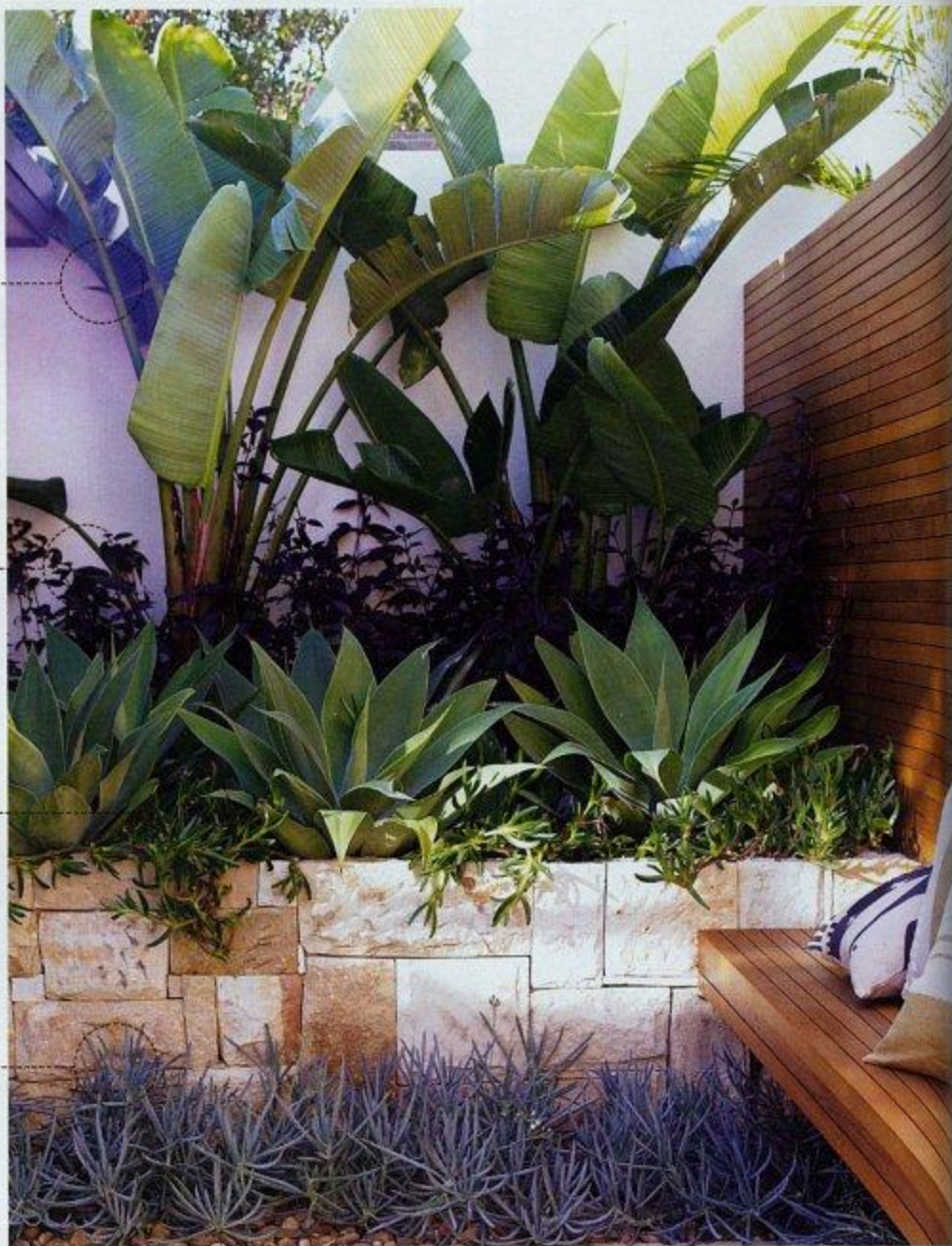
Giant birds of paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*) give height to offset the rear fence while *Alternanthera dentata* 'Purple Knight' provides a rich contrasting colour.

DRAMATIC SHAPES

Pigface (*Carpobrotus*) fills out the spaces between the agaves in the front planter box. Both are drought-tolerant plants that are ideal for sunny coastal conditions.

FINISHING TOUCH

Blue chalksticks (*Senecio serpens*) make a subtle border plant that skirts the recycled sandstone wall and continues under the cantilevered bench seat.





TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SMALL SPACES

Plant the perimeter Keep plantings to the edges of the garden to maximise useable space. "Plant out a wall with climbers to create a vertical, blooming garden," says Andrew.

Add height Direct the eye upwards by creating a variety of vertical planes. Choose tall trees, bamboo or structures such as pergolas.

Think big Large pavers, 50x50cm for example, make a compact area appear bigger.

Rent furniture Don't crowd what limited space you have with unnecessary furniture. For large gatherings Andrew rents a trestle table that runs the length of the courtyard.

GET THE LOOK

* **Go green** For a tropical garden effect, choose plants with large leaves in different tones and shapes. This adds dimension to a space.

* **Create seasons** Choose a variety of plants that flower at different times of year. That way your garden is constantly changing.

* **It's all about contrast** To accentuate the vegetation, paint the walls behind plants a bright white.

CONTACT

Smart Landscaping Solutions, Bondi, NSW
Call (02) 9343 4251

- 1 Cedar-clad studio office
- 2 Planter boxes featuring birds of paradise and agaves
- 3 Benchseat with blue chalksticks underplanting
- 4 Granite-tiled water feature
- 5 Elaeocarpus in planter box
- 6 House
- 7 Bamboo-lined fence
- 8 Merbau decking (although merbau is not considered a sustainable building material, Andrew used certified plantation stock from Indonesia)
- 9 Eco-Stone paving

