How to

MIX IT UP

A former tennis court has become a garden of many delights, with a series of inviting spaces for diverse activities.

TEXT *Elizabeth Wilson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Jason Busch*

Smart casual
Sitting pretty in the avenue of trees, the barbecue area features a spotted-gum deck, a pavilion with an insulated roof and a bar equipped with a drinks fridge. Popham Design clay tiles are from Onsite Supply+Design.

Simple palette
"With a garden of this scale, it's important to keep the colour palette really simple," says Matt. The pear trees are underplanted with *Trachelospermum asiaticum*, trimmed flat and low, with sweet viburnum (*Viburnum odoratissimum*) growing along the fence.

MATT LEACY

Director and designer, Landart Landscapes

The brief

When they moved to this property on Sydney's Northern Beaches, the owners inherited a vast lawn, legacy of a former tennis court, which took up almost the entire 800m² rear garden. While it was a genteel expanse of turf, they wanted a more multi-purpose, multi-dimensional space. With two pre-teen daughters, their wish list included a pool, areas for entertaining and space for a trampoline and ball sports. They turned to Matt to create a garden that would entice the whole family outdoors.

The solution

Matt's challenge was to soften the transition from house to garden and demarcate zones in the space. "The tennis court had been raised a metre above the level of the back door, which disconnected the garden from the house," says Matt. To resolve this, Matt installed a spacious patio to create a link between home and garden. Wide stairs now lead to an upper level garden and there's a series of zones including shady avenues, open lawn, seating areas and a beautifully landscaped pool. In one pocket, there is a deck with a covered pergola, seating, barbecue and bar; in another, a sunken fire pit. "We've created visual interest and intrigue," says Matt. "There's lots to explore, places to retreat to and gorgeous, inviting entertaining spaces." ▶

HELLO SUNSHINE

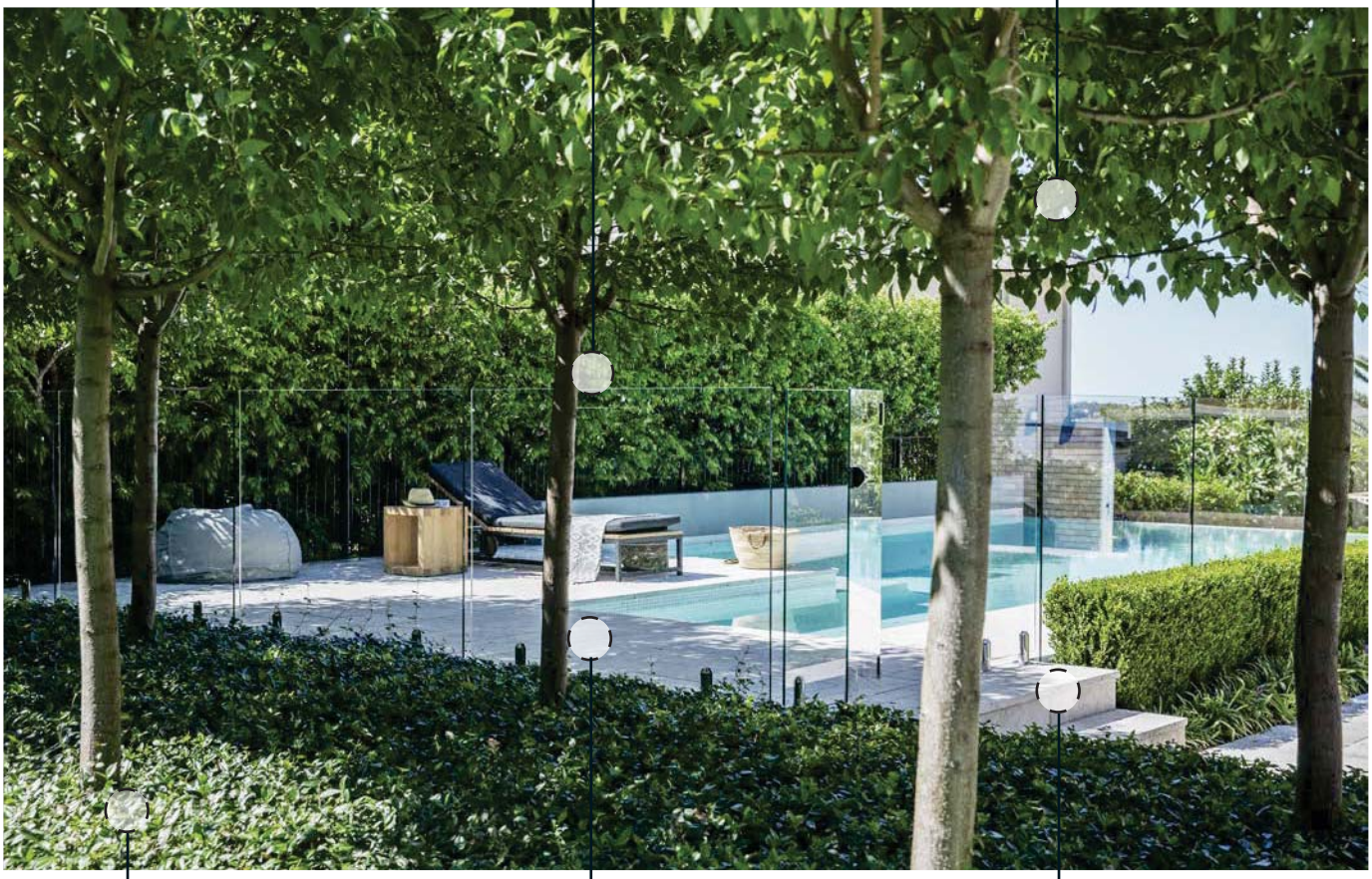
As part of the garden revamp, Matt advised the homeowners to replace their narrow back door with timber-framed bifolds. The rear living room now opens up and connects directly to the 32m² tiled patio, establishing a strong link between home and garden. The steps were designed to invite visitors up to the second tier of the garden. "The steps are both wide and deep, so they become a place where people can sit and hang out," says Matt.

Green screen

Hardy poolside plants include a tall boundary hedge of lilly pilly (*Syzygium* 'Cascade'), and low hedge of *Buxus* 'Faulkner' with *Liriope muscari*. The box hides a retaining wall and helps screen the glass fence.

Shady characters

Ornamental pear trees (*Pyrus nivalis*) are deciduous with a white blossom in spring and thick canopy in summer. "They are bare for six weeks in winter, but they give so much for the rest of the year," says Matt.



Good cover

Japanese star jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*) forms a lush carpet at the base of the trees. "It's a versatile groundcover," says Matt. "It grows in shade, you can mound it and trim it flat and low."

Sweet surrounds

The pool coping and surrounds are tiled in travertine, while the pool is lined with white glass mosaics. "White is the best way to achieve natural water tones," says Matt. "It's like replicating white sand at the beach."

Subtle heights

"To reach the pool there's a level change of 1.4m but you barely notice it because there's such a comfortable shift of levels between the spaces," says Matt.

The aim of good garden design, says Matt, is to create a multifaceted place in which to relax. Here are his top tips:

- ✚ Pleached trees are a great way to define zones and screen out neighbours without enclosing a space. They act as a raised hedge, which is less imposing and lighter in appearance than a regular tall hedge.
- ✚ A fire pit is a great way to get more use out of your garden. It doesn't have to be built-in – a steel bowl can be effective.
- ✚ For a large classic garden like this, I like to use a limited colour and plant palette: this helps bring cohesion and calm to the design. This scheme uses only seven species.
- ✚ Timber furniture helps to soften the hardscaping around the pool and back door.
- ✚ Dense natural stones such as travertine and some limestones are good hardwearing surfaces that stay cool underfoot even in full summer sun.

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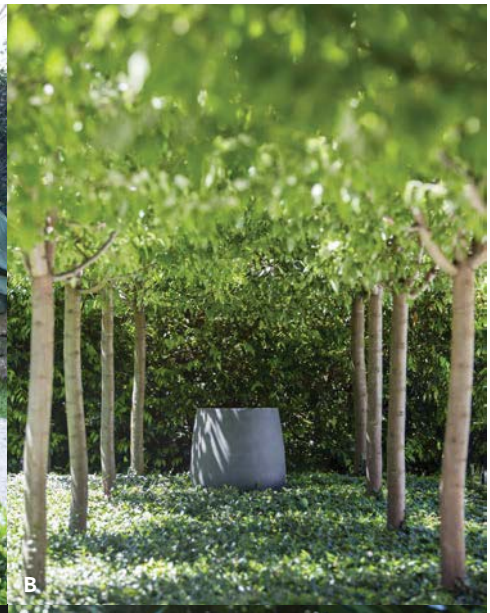
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Illustration by Allison Langton.

1 House
2 *Pyrus nivalis* and *Trachelospermum asiaticum*
3 Lawn
4 Pavilion, deck and barbecue area
5 Palms
6 Fire pit
7 Existing trees
8 Pool

A The fire pit and L-shaped timber bench, flanked by lilly pilly (*Syzygium* 'Cascade'), *Agave attenuata* and dwarf Japanese box (*Buxus* 'Faulkner').
B A large concrete pot forms the focal point at the end of the avenue of snow pears (*Pyrus nivalis*).
C "Agaves add a lovely architectural element and are incredibly low-maintenance," says Matt. Chair from Eco Outdoor.
D *Buxus* and *Liriope muscari*. **H&G**

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