

GARDEN ROOM

Located under an existing Sydney blue gum, the 3.5x3.5m pergola is made from blackbutt, with a limewash finish. Rows of stainless-steel tension wire extend along a wall and across the 'roof', over which star jasmine is being trained. "We wanted a sense of intimacy for this pergola," says Matt. "The homeowners didn't want a heavy structure, so we've made it an open, light-filled garden room."

NO FILTER

The rear wall of the pergola is made of cement sheeting, rendered and painted charcoal. As well as concealing the pool filter, the colour allows the wall to recede and surrounding greenery to pop. Existing plants at the rear of the garden include a transplanted frangipani and an old melaleuca.

GREEN AND WHITE WALLS

Along this boundary of the pergola, Matt has planted *Echium fastuosum* 'Duxfield Blue', a fast-growing shrub that bears purple spire-like flowers in spring. Together with the star jasmine on the tension wire, this will form a green wall. A retaining wall has been wrapped in travertine to create a bench seat in the pergola.

POOLING RESOURCES

The L-shaped pool rises 1.2m out of the ground, creating a courtyard effect for the central area of lawn. The pool tiles are Ezarri glass mosaics; the surround is tiled in 800mm² honed travertine, with an 85mm rebated edge. At the near end is a 450mm-deep wading level. To comply with safety regulations, a glass balustrade wraps around the stairs and along this section of the pool.

JUST PLEACHY

Along the edge of the lawn, Matt planted a row of snow pear trees (*Pyrus nivalis*). "They have a lovely grey-green foliage, they're drought-tolerant and have flushes of blossom in spring," he says. The trees have been pleached, which means the trunks have been cleared of their lower branches.



Matt Leacy
DIRECTOR AND
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"Standing in this garden fills me with a sense of serenity. It is a large space, but feels intimate no matter where you are. The layout gives it a courtyard feel and the different zones all feel connected."

THE BRIEF

When their daughter was young, the owners of this northern Sydney home filled in their old swimming pool to make way for a trampoline and cubbyhouse. But 10 years on, with their daughter reaching her teens, they decided to reinstate a pool to provide their family with self-contained summer fun. They engaged landscape designer Matt Leacy from Landart Landscapes to redesign the garden with a brief to create 'gathering areas' around the pool. "They wanted the design to be simple and timeless, and for those outdoor entertaining areas to have a warm atmosphere," says Matt. He has divided the sloping block into three gently stepped levels. The pool is on the top level, at the rear of the garden, where he has also built an open pergola. On the middle level is a lovely stretch of plush lawn edged in thick hedges, which steps down via broad travertine steps to the lower, outdoor dining, level. This connects directly to the living areas of the home. Plant selection was based on layers of green-grey foliage, with splashes of colour in spring/summer. The easy flow between the zones creates a casual, holiday-at-home feeling, designed to sustain the family for many summers to come.

Design
HOLIDAY AT HOME

Interconnecting leisure zones make this garden so relaxing the owners never want to leave.

TEXT BY ELIZABETH WILSON ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY JASON BUSCH

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H&G GARDENS



< DINING OUT

The outdoor dining area connects to the kitchen, with open bifold windows creating a servery. "The pool is in sight from this area and vice versa," says Matt, who positioned a mirror on the wall above the barbecue to bounce light around the space and help connect the zones. An ingenious retractable blind on tension wire creates a flexible 'roof' for the dining area. Matt used weather-proof awning fabric from UK brand Dickson. Running the length of the pool is a hedge of *Buxus microphylla* 'Faulkner'. The gap between hedge and pool is 900mm. Here, the level drops down 600mm lower than the base of the hedge to form a 1.2m safety barrier.

Pear in there

"Pleaching is a great way to screen without the hedge looking too dominant or enclosing," says Matt of this row of snow pears (*Pyrus nivalis*). He plans to pleach them to a height of 1.8m.

Organic revival

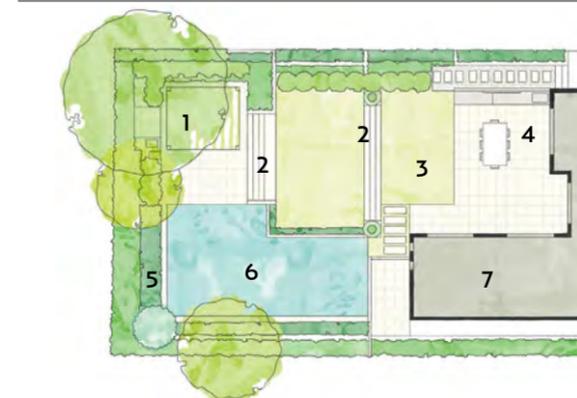
Behind the pear trees, an old lilly pilly (*Syzygium*) hedge was infected with psyllids when Matt began work on the garden. He revived it with Confidor insecticide and organic fertiliser.

Wall of sound

Under the pear trees, Matt has planted *Trachelospermum jasminoides* 'Tricolor', which has pretty pink and cream tones. At the base of the first tree is one of many strategically placed speakers.

Stepping out

Travertine stepping stones are placed within a bed of crushed quartz pebbles. The lawn is Sapphire soft leaf buffalo, which is hardy and easy to maintain.



- 1 Pergola
- 2 Travertine steps
- 3 Lawn
- 4 Terrace with awning
- 5 Hedge
- 6 Pool
- 7 House

Illustration by Allison Langton (opposite). For Where to Buy, see page 259.

A The cooking area features a spotted-gum bench with a limewash finish and Corian benchtop. The wall colour is custom-mixed and the barbecue is from the Electrolux Integrated range.

B At both ends of the steps are oversized fibreglass/concrete pots planted with *Dichondra argentea* 'Silver Falls', which drapes over the sides. A quirky ball of box (*Buxus microphylla* 'Faulkner') sits in the middle of each.

C The dining area's fully extended awning in Dickson solar-protection fabric.

D The view from the dining zone, looking to the pergola. LED strip lighting under each step sends out a soft glow at night. Small speakers are visible on the bottom step, part of a sound system set up throughout the garden.

MATT'S TIPS: PLANTING AROUND A POOL

- ❖ Choose hardy plants. At the back of this pool we have a two-tiered hedge of viburnum and *Xylosma*. Both are resilient shrubs that can tolerate pool water.
- ❖ If the pool is in constant use, give the surrounding plants a good water at the end of the day to wash away any pool water.
- ❖ This is a mineral pool, so it uses less chlorine and is gentler on skin and plants.
- ❖ If you have a chlorine pool, choose tough, thick-leaved plants. If you see signs of yellowing, conduct a pH test on your soil, then add what is needed.
- ❖ When choosing plants to surround a saltwater pool, opt for species that thrive on the coast. *Westringia*, *Carpobrotus* and agave work well. #

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