

How to LIVE ON THE EDGE

Transforming this sloping coastal site into a user-friendly, resort-style hangout with its own jewel-like pool house was a feat of engineering.

STORY *Elizabeth Wilson* | STYLING *Alice Flynn* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Jason Busch*

OVER THE HEDGE

An existing 6m-tall hedge of cypress (*Cupressus x leylandii* 'Leightons Green') along the length of the pool was retained because it offers an established privacy screen. All other plantings except for the Norfolk Island pine are new. "We aimed to create a lush, relaxed, coastal garden," says Matt.

SPARKLING GEM

Built five metres above ground level, this 8.8x7.5m L-shaped pool now sparkles enticingly a short distance from the back door. Matt lined the pool with a pearlescent pale-blue Bisazza mosaic tile to produce the light blue water colour.

TOP JOB

The 8.2x3.2m pool pavilion was designed with a load-bearing roof to accommodate a roof garden. Plants growing here include rosemary, *Crassula ovata* 'Bluebird', *Agave desmettiana* and *Miscanthus sinensis*. Inside, the pavilion is equipped with a kitchen, bathroom, dining table and sofa: the perfect hangout spot. Heaven armchair (on lawn) from Eco Outdoor.

PINE PERFECTION

The giant Norfolk Island pine with spiral layers of branches was preserved in the new design. "We designed everything around the tree," says Matt. "We cantilevered the pool pavilion to protect its roots: it was an engineering triumph."



MATT LEACY

*Director and principal designer,
Landart*

The brief

Living on the coast comes with rewards (glorious ocean views!) and a few challenges. Originally, this rear garden on Sydney's Northern Beaches had a significant slope, with a 6m fall from back door to boundary edge. It was a difficult to use space with no significant plantings except for a beloved Norfolk Island pine.

The owners called on Matt Leacy to design a pool and entertaining area that would lure them from the house into the back garden. The key prerequisite: to protect that pine tree.

The result

The garden is now an enticing social space consisting of an upper lawn and a lower pool level. To add to its pulling power, Matt designed a pool pavilion, which is fully furnished with creature comforts. The result is a feat of engineering and logistics: the pool, for example, sits five metres above natural ground level. Protecting the Norfolk Island pine was also a challenge. "We had to cantilever the pavilion and retaining walls so we didn't disturb the roots of the tree," says Matt. "The engineering was complex. But the tree, I'm happy to say, is thriving."

Designer statement

"We turned a completely unusable disconnected garden into something that is a drawcard and has purpose." ▶

HALE AND HARDY

Plants on the roof of the pool pavilion (right) were chosen to withstand the harsh coastal conditions including full sun and strong onshore winds. Included in this mix is rosemary, *Crassula ovata* 'Blue Bird', *Agave desmettiana* and ornamental grasses. "We love installing roof gardens," says Matt. "Most properties have a roof that could be converted to a garden space and it makes such a difference to the general greenscape." Rosemary is a personal favourite plant of Matt's: "It's a gorgeous plant. It can be trimmed and sculpted or it can be trained to cascade over the edge and look really soft."



COASTAL FRINGE

A kentia palm is underplanted with *Zoysia tenuifolia*, a lush, mounding grass. On the far side of the stairs is *Senecio serpens*, *Crassula ovata* 'Blue Bird', *Rhaphiolepis* 'Oriental Pearl' and native ginger (*Alpinia nutans*).

MATERIAL MEDLEY

The stairs and pavilion floor are paved in soft grey Miramah limestone pavers, teamed with textured Wamberal Freeform natural stone cladding on the retaining walls (both from Eco Outdoor). The rendered walls are painted Dulux Monument.



ON THE LEVELS

"We ended up with only a 2m difference between the upper and lower levels, which was a fantastic outcome given the constraints of the site," Matt says. "We also split the levels so that the transition between them is enjoyable."

SUNNY OUTLOOK

The silver-toned licorice plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*) has amazingly soft, felted foliage yet it is incredibly hardy. "It can be sculpted to whatever shape you desire, and works in small or large spaces," says Matt.

MULTI FOCUS

"The garden was previously a space the residents couldn't use at all; now the whole family uses it together," says Matt. "From swimming, to entertaining, it's now a multifunctional space."

Matt's top tips for coastal planting:

- ✦ Look at which plants are thriving in your neighbours' gardens, or on the headlands around you, and choose the same or similar plants.
- ✦ Make sure the plants you use are suited to the soil type and weather conditions. If it's an exposed area with salty winds, you'll need hardier species than if you're planting in an area protected by the house.
- ✦ Good coastal planting will survive without water but looks a lot better after a drink. A drip-line irrigation system is good.
- ✦ Mulch helps soil retain moisture. If you're on a sandy site, mix organic matter (such as compost) into the sand first before topping with mulch.
- ✦ If your new plants are coming from a nursery and are not accustomed to the exposure levels of your site, erect wind breaks – a hessian barrier or protective sleeve – around the plants until they adapt.



A The pool pavilion is a light-filled, fully-furnished living space designed for comfort, making it possible to spend an entire day away from the main house, dipping between the pool and sofa. The wire furniture is from Eco Outdoor. **B** A hot shower is on offer in the pool pavilion. The hanging plant is a tassel fern (*Phlegmariurus* sp). **C** A dining table and glam bathroom are all contained in the poolside pavilion.

LEFT In its previous iteration, the rear garden was under-used largely because it was two storeys lower than the back door. Matt and his colleague Tom Wright entirely reimagined the space, raising the 'ground level' by five metres, reducing the difference between the top level to the bottom to just two metres. The old cubby (at left) has gone, replaced with an entirely new pool pavilion the whole family enjoys. **H&G**

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