

TALL ORDER

Graced by attractive feature walls screening the less lovely, this resort-style garden in Sydney's east has a little of everything

Oiled cedar and white-pine slats and brick walls painted Dulux Natural White form the structure of this garden. The transplanted frangipani tree is framed by *Heliconia pendula*, which runs along the fence line, underplanted with *Philodendron 'Xanadu'*. Murray Rose copper shower, Robert Plumb Pacific chairs and Breeze sofa, Harbour.



ABOVE Decking planks in New Guinea rosewood run at right angles to the internal floor, drawing the eye outside and emphasising the garden's length. **ABOVE RIGHT** This all-weather space is a hit with the owners. Pots, Bunnings. Easy-care succulents include an array in the bowl, *Crassula* 'Blue Bird' in rear pot, a yucca in front. **OPPOSITE** The working areas of the garden and the vegie patch are hidden from the rest of the yard by lattice screens.



On the level, with a seamless flow inside and out so that house and garden meld into one and the living areas spill onto carpet-like lawn: that sums up the barefoot brief given to landscape designer Fiona Ericsson of Sticks And Stones and architect Michael Cumming for this project in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

The owners, who have two young sons, bought the Federation home in 2015 and moved in one week before the first of their children was born. "It was on a big block in a family-friendly area with double parking," says the owner. "Coming from a terrace, we felt like we'd moved to a park." But that generous garden consisted of a high-maintenance variety of grass and plenty of it, punctuated by discrete and rather formal beds. Most significantly, even though bifolds and a covered deck at the rear of the house had been added in an earlier renovation, there was a disconnect between the living areas and the garden. Like the Great Divide, three steps separated the deck visually and physically from the green expanse below.

However, there were pluses. "The house and garage that bookend the courtyard gave a private feel to a generous space," explains Michael. And as Fiona points out, "The backyard is protected and in full sun, with a well-draining, sandy soil."

The double garage with pergola beside it, together with a feature frangipani, were elements the owners wanted to retain, but the rest definitely needed a makeover. "The owners wanted a resort-style garden, with a turfed area to create a flow from inside to out for the family to enjoy," says Fiona. Michael concurs: "We envisioned opening up the living room and connecting it seamlessly to a beautiful landscaped courtyard. With this young family and their love for the beach and Sydney summers, the brief was to connect the living room to a beautifully liveable deck and garden, including a new pool."

No resort is without the latter, which Michael installed at the same height as the living areas. He raised the garden, too, so it, the deck and pool are on the one level without pause. "It makes the living spaces and garden feel part of one another," he says.

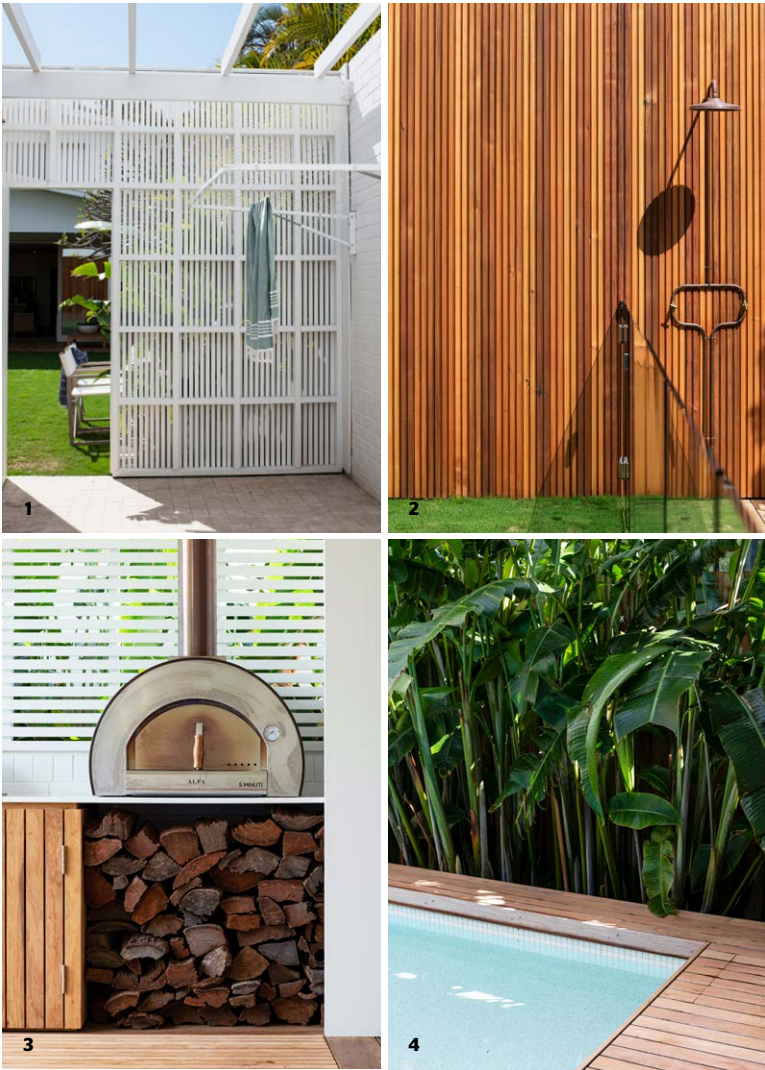
Meanwhile, in the living room, Michael replaced bland aluminium bifolds with three generous timber sliders, leading to the new deck comprising thin slats of New Guinea rosewood.



“The brief was to connect the lounge room to a beautifully liveable deck and garden, including a new pool”

MICHAEL CUMMING, ARCHITECT

Poised between indoors and out, this external kitchen gets plenty of use. Five Minuti pizza oven, Alfa. Signature ProLine barbecue, BeefEater. Bird of paradise adorns the tall pot from Koskela, with *Crassula* 'Blue Bird' in the smaller one from Bunnings.



DESIGN DETAILS

- 1** Screening is used to great effect, in this case to separate the garden's various elements, including the lawn and pool. Hills 'Everyday' wall-mounted clothes line from Bunnings.

2 The cedar screen at the rear hides the garage and provides a backdrop for the striking Murray Rose outdoor shower from Robert Plumb. The tough Sir Walter buffalo grass runs up to the wall, creating the effect of an outdoor room.
- 3** The sculptural pizza oven provides both a talking point and place to gather in this family area. Pizzas are on the menu most weekends, enjoyed in this sheltered, informal space.

4 Timber and tile used for the pool area are a study in contrasts, the former treated to withstand pool-water splashes and the rigours of the weather. Just as hardy and striking is the *Heliconia pendula* in the garden immediately behind.



ABOVE In the kitchen garden, assorted vegies occupy a weathered Birdies iron trough from Bunnings, with Madagascan jasmine reaching up the wall behind. **BELOW** Pots from Koskela and Bunnings contain rosemary, basil and other herbs (in large), plus *Crassula ovata* ‘Gollum’ (medium) and yucca (small). **OPPOSITE** The hardy plants beside the pool are resistant to pool chemicals.



“Care was taken to sand and refinish the internal floorboards to create a consistent tone inside and out,” he explains. For a sense of privacy and containment, timber batten screens were installed on each side of the deck, mounted horizontally to accentuate width. Together with the ceilings and existing brickwork, they are painted white to evoke a breezy summer feel. Adding to its indoor-outdoor credentials, the covered deck boasts a barbecue and pizza oven, plus a custom-designed rosewood bench and coffee table.

At the back of the garden, another timber screen was run the full width of the yard, for a sense of enclosure and to link the garage with the adjoining pergola; one half is painted and the other is stained to soften the expanse. Similarly, the pool fencing and deck fixings are all hidden to reduce visual clutter.

Many items were recycled from the earlier garden. “We updated the pergola by painting it to match the garage, and moved the bin store from the front yard to the utilities area beside the garage, where we also created a clothes-drying space and a vegetable garden,” says Fiona.

As well as those hardscaping elements, a signature frangipani tree near the house, which would have impeded the flow between inside and out, was cleverly recycled. “This magnificent mature frangipani was moved about two metres towards the back to make the design work,” says Fiona. It now envelops a second seating area near the timber-battened pergola.

Plant-wise, restraint ruled. “We kept the plant palette simple, to let the house and garage be the heroes,” says Fiona. The requested lush green foliage includes swathes of large-leafed tropical and subtropical varieties, such as *Heliconia pendula* and *Philodendron* ‘Xanadu’ in mass plantings along the boundaries, both for instant coverage and to engender that luxuriant resort feel. They are further fostered by the shag-pile carpet of the Sir Walter buffalo-grass lawn. The robustness of all three makes them ideal for the splash zone beside the pool, while a palm backdrop is a fortuitous borrowed landscape from next door. “I love this plant palette,” says Fiona. “It makes the space feel calm and open yet private at the same time.”

Generating calm is perhaps not the overriding purpose of the project, though. “The back garden is now an extension of our house,” says the owner. “We have two little boys, so levelling it out has made it feel part of the living area. As a result, they spend so much more time outdoors – running around, playing cricket, tennis, rugby and, of course, swimming. It feels like our own little country club, which was so perfect during the long months of lockdown.” **10**

Projects by Sticks And Stones can be viewed at sticksandstonesld.com.au. To see more of Michael’s work, visit michaelcummingarchitect.com.au



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FIONA ERICSSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER