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Young tulip trees frame the spacious homestead.
FACING PAGE Landscape designer Julia Levitt,
of Nelson Thomas, shaped the extensive gardens
and grounds across a two-year period.

STABLE GROUND

LAYERED GARDENS FLOW ACROSS TWO HECTARES AT THIS SPRAWLING
RANCH-STYLE RESIDENCE WITH AN EQUESTRIAN FOCUS.

WORDS JESSICA BELLEF PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT





GENEROUS IN SCALE AND SPIRIT, this sprawling estate sits atop a natural escarpment some distance from Sydney, on its green north-west surrounds. The design and construction company Cadence & Co developed the two hectares for a large family who loves to entertain. The impressive outcome is a haven where kith and kin gather while soaking up valley views and seasonal rhythms.

The homestead perches on the acreage's highest point, with a sweeping panorama that captures a national park to the south. To the western-oriented back of the dwelling, by the tennis court, you'll find a pool and a resort-style pavilion flanked by two towering Canary Island date palms. Sun-drenched lawns and paved entertaining areas sit to the north, while the south side falls away to terraced paddocks, an Olympic-sized equestrian arena and stables.

When landscape designer Julia Levitt of Nelson Thomas joined this project in 2017, the construction and extensive earthworks were well underway. "We started at the top >

"It's about prioritising the spaces that will be seen and enjoyed regularly. That's where you should create interest and invest in special features."



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Japanese anemones add splashes of pink among the greenery; "I encourage my clients to keep the grasses even when they are dying back because they add strong colour and an architectural element," says Julia. "We selected hardy, low-maintenance plants," Julia adds. "The catmint needs a good cut back and then it just spills over. The rosemary is also low-maintenance,"; delicate detail in the blush-coloured Japanese anemones. **FACING PAGE** Helichrysum, Japanese anemone and buxus sit at varying levels beyond the homestead.



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The property includes a kitchen garden, chicken coop, built-in trampoline and sandpits; vibrant bursts of red *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy'; "I aimed to create highly layered plantings closer to the home that could be enjoyed from the inside out," says Julia. **FACING PAGE** "It was about selecting plants that matched or complemented the colour of the bush around us. There's lots of beautiful seasonal interest in the garden," says Julia. "We've got the anemones flowering in autumn, and salvias and saura through summer."

around the residence and then worked our way down," says Julia of the process, which spanned two years.

The home's architecture comprises rustic materials that weather beautifully, including Western red cedar shingles, hardwood beams and richly hued stonework. The organic textures flow across the grounds, where sandstone logs terrace the extreme slope, stone-clad walls define the lawns and garden beds, and rough-sawn timber posts form pergolas and paddock fencing.

The hardscaping articulates the homeowner's design brief, which was inspired by their love of ranch-style properties found in California's Napa Valley and the mountain lodges of New Zealand. Conscious that both design styles are linked to the character of their surroundings, Julia devised a planting scheme that subtly referenced the colours and textures of the neighbouring native bushlands.

"I didn't want it to look like we picked up Napa Valley and put it in the bush," explains Julia. "My intention was to >

meet it halfway and give our clients a Mediterranean feel – essentially similar to the Californian climate, with very drought-tolerant plantings – and apply that to the Australian environment, because that's the beautiful outlook."

The homeowners also wanted to include deciduous trees and plants that herald the seasons. "It was a very fine balance of getting those combinations and colour palettes together and spacing them out correctly so it feels connected," Julia adds.

Avenues of shapely tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Fastigiata') guide the journey through the property and splash the vista with luminescent yellow foliage come autumn. "There are also some blue spruce trees mixed in, which aren't deciduous, but they added that New Zealand-lodge look, and picked up the dusty blue and sage tones in the hardscaping and surrounding valley," Julia explains.

In the areas dedicated to equine activities, Julia specified horse-friendly tree varieties that are non-toxic and devoid of large seedpods that could drop and spook the animals or get caught in their hooves. Black poplars (*Populus nigra*) and magnolia trees (*Magnolia x soulangeana*) met the requirements, and now provide shade and wind protection around the arena, paddocks and stables.

As a sanctuary of indoor-outdoor living, the homestead opens onto a lush garden and manicured lawns. "It's about prioritising the spaces that will be seen and enjoyed regularly," says Julia. "That's where you should create interest and invest in special features."

The garden beds surrounding the home feature the landscaping scheme's hero – a series of olive trees (*Olea europaea*) sourced from an olive tree farm in Orange. The 50-year-old specimens relish the full sun and undeniably evoke the Mediterranean-inflected, Californian wine country look the homeowners desired.

Silvery mounds of helichrysum, waves of native tussock grasses and thick tangles of coastal rosemary mingle beneath the olive trees and spill over the stone walls. Delicate florals like Japanese windflower (*Anemone japonica*), catmint (*Nepeta cataria*) and gaura, or butterfly bush, add to the beguiling array. "It has a whimsical, relaxed look," says Julia. This delightful combination repeats around the arena and the stable's main entrance, creating a conversation between the top and bottom areas of the sweeping grounds.

The serenity of the surrounding bushland washes over the estate and provides the perfect atmosphere for special occasions, which so far has included a joyous sunset wedding on the lawn. As the trees grow and the landscaping materials patina over time, the stately property will continue to settle on the hill and nurture happy memories for future generations. *CS*

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Olive trees stretch beyond the property gate, which leads to the north side of the home. "Olive trees don't like wet feet, so we had to make sure the underplanting was happy to be a bit drier," says Julia. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Vivid *Anemone japonica* bursts forth among patches of green. "The plant selection overall is fairly low maintenance because it all suits the climate," says Julia; "The layered planting and seasonal interest, brought through with grasses, flowers and trees, creates a grounded, calming feeling."