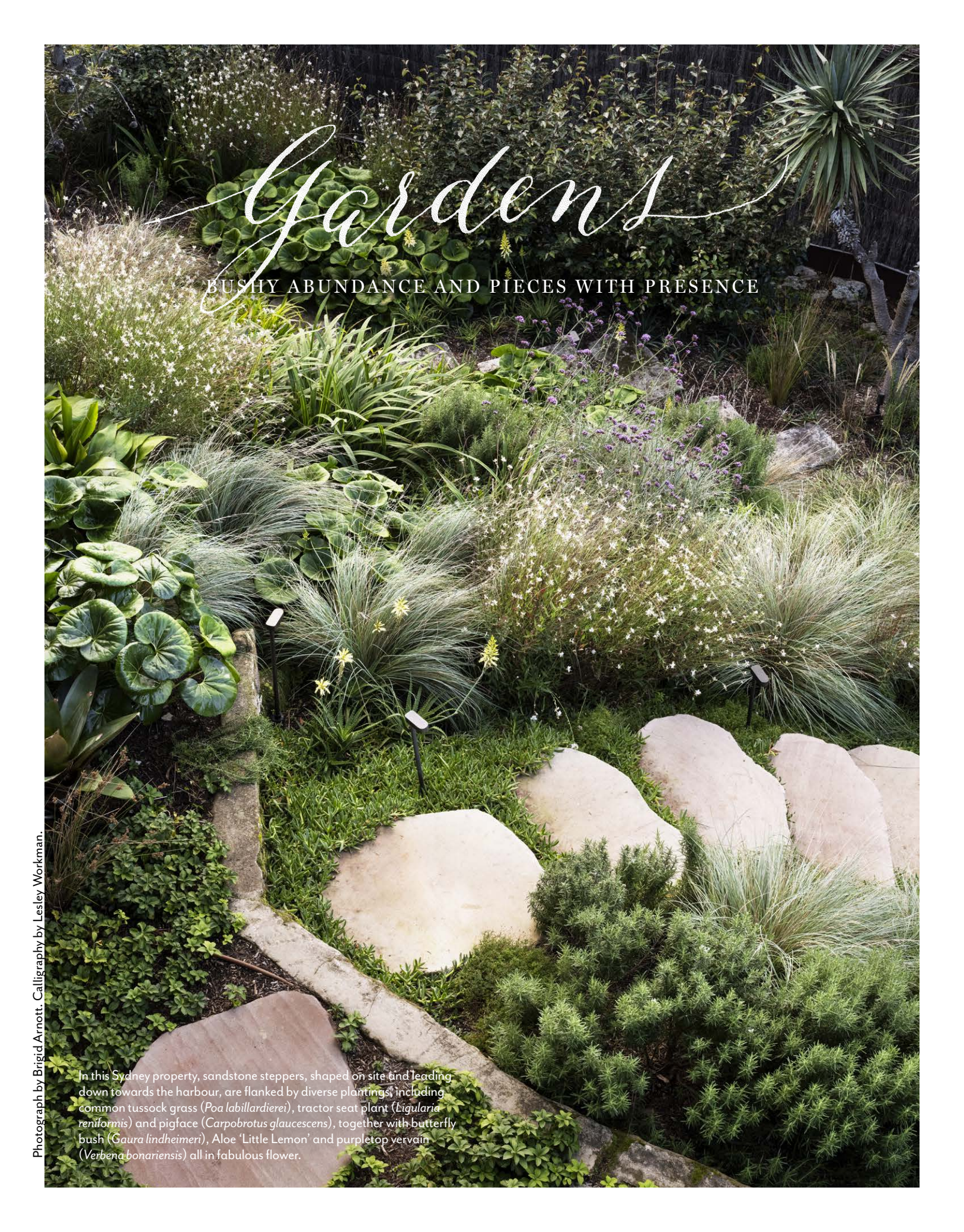




Gardens

BUSHY ABUNDANCE AND PIECES WITH PRESENCE

Photograph by Brigid Arnott. Calligraphy by Lesley Workman.

In this Sydney property, sandstone steppers, shaped on site and leading down towards the harbour, are flanked by diverse plantings, including common tussock grass (*Poa labillardierei*), tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*) and pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*), together with butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri*), Aloe 'Little Lemon' and purpletop vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*) all in fabulous flower.

In the front of the house, the diverse plantings include wispy xanthorrhoea (*Xanthorrhoea glauca*) and grasses such as common tussock grass (*Poa labillardierei*) and Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*), together with Tennyson blue agave (*Agave hybrida* 'Tennyson Blue'), silver shield (*Plectranthus argentatus* 'Silver Shield'), butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri*), pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) and purpletop vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*) for a burst of colour. Light fittings from Gardens at Night. Sandstone steppers shaped on site. Corten edging cut to fit. Architecture by Jorge Hrdina Architects.

GOING *with the flow*

A sprawling garden in a leafy suburb is in total harmony with its bush-clad waterside location.

STORY *Chris Pearson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Brigid Arlott*



Under a towering mature red gum are silverthorn (*Elaeagnus pungens*), African spur flower (*Plectranthus ciliatus*), xanthorrhoea (*Xanthorrhoea glauca*), Tennyson blue agave (*Agave hybrida* 'Tennyson Blue'), pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) and cut-leaf daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*). Light fittings from Gardens at Night. *Opposite, top left* On the path down towards the water, a saw-tooth banksia tree (*Banksia serrata*) is underplanted with common rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*), purpletop vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*), common tussock grass (*Poa labillardierei*) blue flax lily (*Dianella caerulea*). *Top right* Wispy Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) creates movement in the wind and light plays. *Bottom right* An Australian tree fern (*Cyathea cooperi*) and silver shield (*Plectranthus argentatus*) groundcover create alluring tonal contrasts.



As the empty-nester owners of this home on Sydney's Lower North Shore entered a new phase in their lives, so, too, did their house, which they had bought in 1996 to raise a family. Five years ago, they asked architect Jorge Hrdina and director Julia Levitt of Nelson Thomas, along with senior landscape designer Sarah Marcellino, to refresh their harbourside property. The garden was previously designed by the late Peter Fudge, and, true to his signature style, celebrated the rocky bush-clad location.

"It had beautiful bones and fantastic existing trees," says Julia. "The homeowners were passionate about bringing it back to life while incorporating new areas created by the house renovation." In their brief to Julia, they wanted "an open space to entertain, a quiet moment in the landscape to rest and an area for vegies and herbs". The sloping site had many microclimates, some with deep shade, others in full sun.

Julia had plenty to work with, including generous gardens, front and back. Using Walter Burley Griffin as his muse, Jorge ensured the home was immersed in its setting, by incorporating all-weather entertaining areas, walls of glass and natural

materials, such as timber, sandstone and a copper roof, all of which would be echoed in the landscape and Julia's hardscaping choices. "Taking direction from the outcrops, we selected sandstone freeform steppers, while the driveway is in crazy paving," she says.

"As with the house, the owners wanted the plants to be sympathetic to their environment," says Julia. That meant an emphasis on low-maintenance, robust varieties with an emphasis on natives, with existing mature specimens, such as a grove of five angophoras (*Angophora costata*), banksias (*Banksia serrata*), grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea spp.*) and lacy tree ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*), all setting the tone and retained as instant canopy. "We wanted the plant palette to be largely native, but not in a strict or traditional sense," she says.

In the front driveway, the owners wanted a sense of arrival. Julia replaced parts of the driveway closest to the house with lawn, surrounded by diverse layered plantings of grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea spp.*), Swedish ivy (*Plectranthus nico*), purpletop vervain (*Verbena bonariensis*), butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri*), rock orchids (*Dendrobium speciosum*) and Chinese silvergrass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). ►



“We wanted to give the entry softness, but also movement, to offset the architecture and complement the existing ferns and angophoras, while also providing a beautiful outlook,” she says.

Jorge added a separate carport and studio, surrounded by soft, layered planting, such as lacy tree ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*), medinilla (*Medinilla myriantha*), Swedish ivy (*Plectranthus ‘Nico’*) and strappy-leaved walking iris (*Neomarica gracilis*), with kangaroo vine (*Cissus antarctica*) trailing up the carport. “These gardens were mainly for aesthetics and to be viewed, rather than actively engaged with,” says Julia. By contrast, in a sunny spot along the side of the house, she created a produce garden.

The garden on the south side, blessed with water views and all-day sun, was a different proposition. “We made this a whimsical space, where you can savour the journey down towards the water,” says Julia. Eclectic plantings include butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri* ‘White’) and prickly rasp ferns (*Doodia aspera*), with groundcovers such as cushion bush (*Scleranthus*

biflorus) and tussock grass (*Poa labillardieri* ‘Eskdale’), and Tennyson Blue agaves (*Agave hybrida* ‘Tennyson Blue’).

Massed plantings create unity and richness throughout. “With more than 50 different species over a vast area and a plant palette so incredibly diverse, we used mass planting to break it up and rest the eye, while also creating lushness,” says Julia. This also addressed a tricky site. Under that grove of angophoras, the owners had previously had no success with growing any plants. “So we selected one grass, lomandra (*Lomandra longifolia* ‘Tanika’), which we knew would work, and planted that en masse.”

And what is Julia most proud of? “Having a strong understanding of the site and suitable plants allowed us to work with it, rather than against it,” she says. “I love the garden’s natural integration to the site. It’s not one particular element that stands out, but rather an overall feeling of peaceful harmony.” **H&G**

Nelson Thomas: nelsonthomas.com.au.

Jorge Hrdina Architects: jorgehrdina.com.au.

Clockwise, from above left Prickly rasp fern (*Doodia aspera*), lava moss (*Scleranthus biflorus*), knobby club-rush (*Ficinia nodosa*), silver lady fern (*Blechnum gibbum*), cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*) and imperial bromeliad (*Alcantarea imperialis*). Sandstone steppers shaped on site. Architecture by Jorge Hrdina Architects.

Australian cycad (*Macrozamia communis*). Butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri*), common tussock grass (*Poa labillardieri*), Aloe ‘Little Lemon’, tractor seat plant (*Ligularia reniformis*), cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*) and prostrate rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). Light fittings by Gardens at Night.

PLANT LIST

TREES

Angophoras
(*Angophora costata*)
Grass trees
(*Xanthorrhoea spp.*)
Saw-tooth banksia
(*Banksia serrata*)

STRAPPY-LEAFED PLANTS

Rock orchid
(*Dendrobium speciosum*)
Walking iris
(*Neomarica gracilis*)

FERNS

Lacy tree fern
(*Cyathea cooperi*)
Prickly rasp fern
(*Doodia aspera*)

PERENNIALS

Butterfly bush
(*Gaura lindheimeri* ‘White’)
Silver spur flower
(*Plectranthus argentatus*)
Speckled spur flower
(*Plectranthus ciliatus*)

CLIMBING PLANTS

Oak leaf ivy
(*Cissus rhombifolia*
‘Ellen Danica’)
Swedish ivy
(*Plectranthus ‘Nico’*)

GRASSES

Chinese silvergrass
(*Miscanthus sinensis*)
Tussock grass
(*Poa labillardieri* ‘Eskdale’)

SUCCULENTS

Agave Tennyson Blue
(*Agave hybrida*
‘Tennyson Blue’)

Leading down to the waterside hardwood deck, sandstone steppers, shaped on site, are flanked by diverse plantings, including butterfly bush (*Gaura lindheimeri*), common tussock grass (*Poa labillardieri*) and a xanthorrhoea (*Xanthorrhoea glauca*).