

Tropicana

From an uninspiring backyard with a dated pool and mismatched planting selection to this – a stunning, spacious outdoor area with renovated pool, clean lines and a tropical planting scheme. Amanda Elboz from Space Landscape Designs, certainly had her hands full with this project! Here, Amanda talks about the backyard transformation of this Northern Beaches, Sydney home.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD BIRCH

THE BRIEF

The clients wanted a large outdoor entertaining area that was level with the bottom level of the house. They also requested a sizeable recreational lawn area for hosting family gatherings and parties, and for children to play. Because of the large size of the block and the pool, the outdoor space demanded, and needed, a big lawn space – there was no point putting in a small patch of grass because everything needed to be in proportion.

In terms of maintenance, the clients were not interested in high-maintenance materials like timber decking. Although a good product that blends well with other materials, timber decking requires regular care. To fulfil the brief, paving was chosen as its hard-wearing, long lasting and low-maintenance.

The clients also liked the idea of a tropical theme with lots of natural colour, so we used materials, like limestone paving, in lighter shades. This meant colour was introduced through the tropical planting scheme and furnishings.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The pool was renovated rather than replaced as it was in good condition. To modernise the surrounding area, architectural concrete pavers were installed. This worked well with the curved angle of the pool and



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came in a variety of shapes making it easy to form around the pool’s unique shape.

As well as the backyard, the house was also being renovated and clad in sandstone, so we needed a product that would work with the new look of the house. A solution was found in large pieces of limestone which was used around the lower level of the house. This allowed the backyard to flow on from the back of the house and provided a link between the interior and exterior.

The limestone paving also gives a visual impact of space – if you have one paved area leading onto the lawn at the same level it gives the illusion of an open area and becomes part of the house as well.

With such a large pool and lawn area, a lush planting scheme was needed. To ensure the look was instant, many of the plants we put in were mature.



THE PROJECT

Although the structure and design of the pool was left alone, the rest of the backyard was a major renovation.

Originally, the pool was surrounded by old timber decking and some ugly metal fencing. Not only this, but the space was not functional and interrupted the flow of the whole outdoor area. The walkway around the pool was limited and there was no room to relax. By paving the pool area with architectural concrete pavers we maximised the space all on the one level and created a functional area with visual flow. We also replaced the metal fencing with glass, increased the walking space and squared off the pool area so it complemented the straight lines of the house.

An interesting shape, the pool is deep with a built in diving board, so the homeowners were happy to leave it as it was. Luckily the pool was found to be in good condition after it was tested. The interior tiles were kept and the waterline tiles were replaced with deep blue glass mosaic ones, this modernised the design, added colour and reflected the vibrancy of the blue Australian sky. A lighting system was already in place in the pool but we changed the light fixtures to LED.

The paved, elevated platform area with the daybed is another area we created to sit around the pool and enjoy the view of the backyard. A relaxing, area close to the pool zone it was originally just a small patch of lawn and weeds.



Starting on the project, we first had to work out the areas of the retaining walls, walkways, walls and the water feature. Once all the layout of the land was complete and the main structures built we moved into the planting phase. The lighting was done after the planting was complete so we could see which plants and areas needed to be highlighted and where feature lights could go.

At the back of the lawn we terraced the area to work with the fall as it drops down quite far into the house below. The terraced areas aren't being used but because the levels were moved around it had to be retained at the bottom. The plants there will eventually grow and fill the area that's divided, retain the flat, back lawn

area. The height of the walls weren't changed dramatically, only by half a metre or so, so structurally we didn't have to make large retaining walls, we just fixed and strengthened the ones already in place.

A water feature was installed at the edge of the lawn area. There's a big pocket of space there, so rather than having it in the middle of the yard and getting in the way, the water feature is in line with a pathway that leads to the other side of the house. So visually you can see the water feature as you walk down the pathway. We selected Nepean river pebbles for the water feature for its natural feel, it also echoes the tropical planting scheme.

Materials like the limestone paving, Nepean river pebbles and architectural concrete pavers were chosen to make the backyard feel like part of the house and not a separate section. Some of the materials were used at the front of the house as well, for cohesion. It's important to have good quality products instead of lots of different products – quality products are low maintenance and will last longer.

SPACE LANDSCAPE DESIGNS' MAINTENANCE TIPS

- Get the plan and layout right first.
- Choose the right materials and finishes for the job. Make sure they blend in with the house and are durable.
- Be mindful of the colour and foliage of the plant selection. Make sure the plants match and work with the landscaping and can handle the conditions of the area.

PLANTING

Before the renovation, the planting scheme was nonexistent and completely mismatched. The garden was made up of hedges, patches of lawn and a mix of unusable plants – there was no form, sequence or design to the backyard at all.

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RESULT

This backyard has been designed to be functional all year round. There are shaded areas where you can entertain in summer and the lawn area is nice and lush during winter. It’s a good area for families too as there’s plenty of room for kids to play and parents to keep a watchful eye over them.

Unlike before when the backyard was tight and divided with no colour or life, the area is now visually spacious and enticing. The lawn is now level with the back of the house so you get that vision of a large outdoor area that’s like an extension of the house – there’s a flow on effect so everything feels connected.



With a tropical planting scheme in place for the renovation, the species chosen were all hard-wearing, low maintenance and colourful. The homeowners didn’t want anything to grow too high to encroach on the sea views so we were mindful of this when selecting the plants. That said, the homeowners did request taller plants to go along the perimeter of the property for privacy.

We also included some feature plants, like the two large dragon trees as you come into the pool area. These will grow and become an exotic highlight to the garden over time.

Palm trees, like the Travellers Palm and Golden Cane Palm add to the tropical vibe, while shrubs and plants like Cycad, Dwarf Date Palm, Bird of Paradise, Dwarf White African Lily and Philodendron complete the look.

CHALLENGES

The size of the block was a challenge and access was restricted to one set of old sandstone stairs on the side of the house. As our only point of access, we knew the steps would suffer so we cleaned and fixed them up after completion. .



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