



THE MANY OUTDOOR ROOMS

A behind-the-scenes look at creating the 2014 Sydney Garden Show

Words Chris Slaughter

The excitement and support of the show organisers, AGB Events, was wonderful. Our footprint was growing and the massive positive drive created by the supporting companies was outstanding. Without their construction skills, we could not have achieved what we did. They include Edward Donovan Landscapes, Integral Landscapes and Antscapes to name a few. I personally thank you for your individual commitment and can-do attitude. This being said, we still had a long way to go. It is truly amazing how much material is required for such a venture – steel, timber, nails, nuts and bolts. Thank you to Midcoast Timbers and Materials in The Raw.

All the elements were coming together, despite the hard work and long weekends. The stage was a particularly thought-provoking element. We had to have a secure and structurally sound platform to work off. The allocated piece of land was probably the flattest we could have been given, but there was still a 40cm height difference across the garden's length. Various ideas for the platforms were thrown about, from staging to ground levelling to pelleting. As time was becoming critical and decisions had to be made, this was delegated to other board members within the Landscape Institute.

Now with some free time on my hands, I was able to spend a truly enjoyable day, coffee in hand, walking through the grounds of Alpine Nurseries with Angus Munro, deciding on the plants we would use to give the show garden its completeness. There is something a little surreal about walking past some 161 Carissa Desert Star plants and saying, "Let's have that lot," and ringing them off to reserve them. Or coming across a group of Prunus x bilireana just about to explode into colour and debating if that will happen at the time of the show. It was a very enjoyable afternoon indeed, and Angus and Peter, I thank you for your massive help with this.



On the same day, I had to have a follow-up meeting with the Nursery & Garden Industry NSW & ACT Ltd, so I shot over to start the fine-tuning of how they would be able to best help with the show. The NGINA put up its hand to be involved at the very first meeting, but had since been toying with the idea of having a garden attached to the current outdoor room. It would be a different style of garden, one that concentrated on how we can use and show plants to create a garden that is not so reliant upon hard structure. One could say a cottage-style garden. This dull rumble of an idea became a very loud yes, even though there were only five weeks to go. We had enough to create the outdoor room garden and its associated embrace garden, but we had nobody to help out with the new NGINA garden.

At a previous function, where I had presented the initial



garden idea to a group of Landscape Institute members, one individual pulled me aside and expressed an interest in becoming involved. Paul Glover of Natural Elements Landscapes stepped up to the plate and grabbed the NGINA garden with both hands. A massive ask and thank you Paul.

Using the same concept as the outdoor room, I wanted to give visitors an experience different to that of the normal "look don't touch" show garden. I wanted to allow people to come up to the house, wander through the front garden onto the home's porch and be beckoned through the front door held open by an old boot dovetailing as a pot (PHOTO 3). As you go through the front/back door, your eye is drawn to the casual curve of a herringbone-laid brick path (PHOTO 7).

Nestled into the first curve is a steel bowl converted into a water feature, offering huge reflections and creating a shimmering effect (PHOTO 5). As your eyes lift, you notice some espaliers and, surprisingly, a small face looking back at

you — through holes cut in the boundary wall for mum, dad and their little ones to get a unique glimpse of what's inside.

D-day arrived and the heavens opened. A collection of landscaper lites was dotted around and in front of us was the expanse of Centennial Park. The team was on hand and collectively, we started to set out the various gardens (PHOTO 6). We measured, sprayed up and measured again. During the next 10 days, the gardens were pushed and shoved. The rain stayed with us for the duration of the build, but besides that, it was an experience like no other. The show attracted many well-recognised designers including Andrew Fisher Tomlinson from the UK along with Angus Stewart, Graham Ross, Don Bourke and Charlie Albone.

The show was open, and despite the rain and some technical hiccups, the outdoor room garden shone. The vertical garden walls were bathed in a huge collection of plant stock suitable for such an application (PHOTO 4).



Some great plants for this application include Philodendron Congo – red and green, Neomanica gracilis, Anthurium, Spathiphyllum, Chlorophytum – variegated, assorted ferns. They can even be used to support your favourite herbs for cooking.

The lighting shining down created shadows and accents on the various structures of the room, and the roof screen, fireplace nestled within the green wall and the zappy cushions, lent the outdoor lounge that extra bit of fun (PHOTO 11). Also spectacular was the bespoke barbecue, supporting not only a barbecue but also a sensible work space and a cantilever two-piece sink arrangement able to support herbs or ice for a cold bottle of your favourite bubbly or beer (PHOTO 8).

Embracing this room were semi-mature trees of various species, namely Eucalyptus tereticornis 'Blue Gum', Tristaniopsis laurina 'Luscious', and hugging their base Westringia 'Jervis Gem', to name a few. From the outdoor room, the path flowed into the main think tank. A set of gardens in each corner offered both rest and a point of difference regarding materials perhaps not thought about



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before. The room worked very well and gave the public the chance to escape the rain, getting across a stronger message as to why you should always consider using trained, experienced and insured experts to design, supply and create your dream garden.

It was a similar story with the other gardens, which boasted an equally impressive array of plantings, wheel barrows bursting with colour, eclectic collections of old stoves, jars and

even old ornamental bird cages filled with plants, swaying in the breeze (PHOTOS 9, 10, 12).

Even an old coal Weber barbecue was used, and a forgotten bath, which proved to be the piece de resistance. Partly sunk, it was filled with globe artichoke plants and their delicate-looking silvery green foliage (PHOTO 13).

In the end we did it – three gardens that started as one. It was a massive task, achieved only due to the enormous efforts of so many individuals and

companies. Even if you were not able to visit the show, I hope this article inspires you to have a go, as gardens can have a positive impact not only on your home, but on your lifestyle, too.

Enjoy your garden and find the hidden jewels it has to offer. 🌿

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