

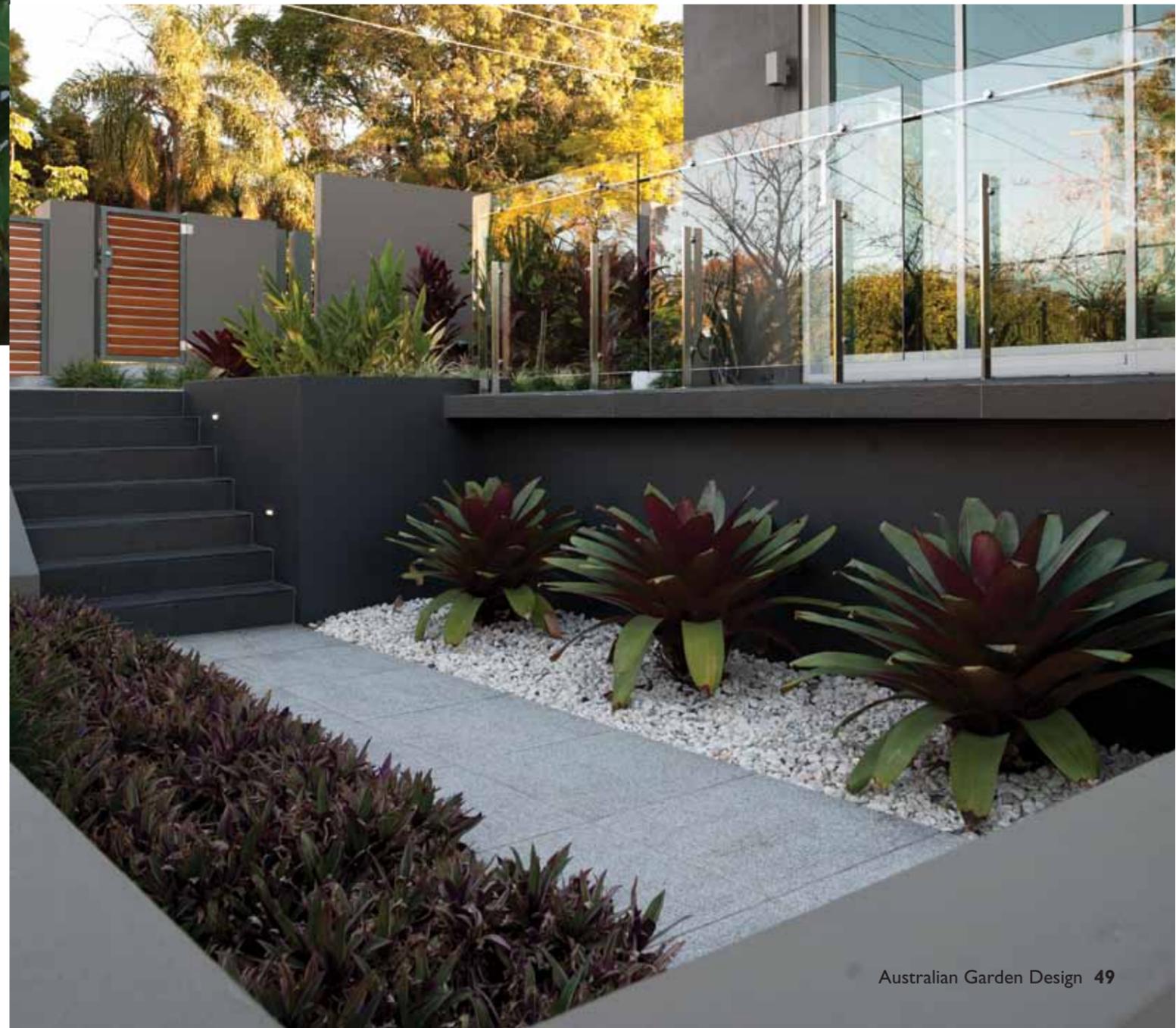
TROPICAL *paradise*

A modern, multi-story house with a swimming pool and tropical landscaping. The house features a dark grey facade, large glass windows, and a balcony with a glass railing. The pool is surrounded by a concrete deck and a glass railing. The landscaping includes various tropical plants, including palm trees and ferns, and a blue mosaic tile pool edge. The house is situated on a hillside, and a utility pole is visible in the background.

With the landscape and construction plans of this home in Paddington, Brisbane occurring simultaneously, Aaron Worth from Utopia Landscape Design knew it was important to consider every angle of the outdoor area for a harmonious and unified end look. Here he talks about the project and how he created a tropical paradise for the homeowners.



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THE PROJECT

Located in Paddington Brisbane, the landscape of this home was planned during the house’s construction. A very contemporary three-level residence designed by architect Teo Cavallo, the property encapsulates views of the city, while the pool and garden areas are very visible from the house due to the generous use of glass. With this in mind, the gardens were planned to play an integral part from within the home as well as enhance the building’s street appeal.

Tropical flora was favoured from the beginning due to the speed of growth in the Queensland climate, lush appearance and awesome colour statements.

HOW WE DID IT

Tropical plantings were preferred from the project’s conception – the climate justified the choice due to the Queensland humidity and rainfall and the sheer variety of plant choices available. Microclimatic considerations such as sun and shade aspects and prevailing winds played a part in the placement of certain species.

The site was heavily sloping and had been substantially excavated in order to construct the home, so much of the topsoil had been removed, leaving clay/loam with some shale. Once the required major hardscape elements such as retaining walls, fencing and infrastructure were put in place, the soft landscape started to evolve.

Gypsum was applied to assist in breaking up existing sub-surface layers and high quality, pH-neutral garden soil was imported as tropicals prefer a rich and well-draining medium. This soil was combined with existing material and used to build garden beds further. Fine hoop pine bark mulch was applied to help control weed growth and provide longer term sustenance.

The tropical plant selection included quite a mixture of species to create the desired effect, including Philodendron ‘Xanadu’, Liriope ‘Evergreen Giant’, Rhoecoloma ‘Sugarplum Fairy’ and mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*). A variety of cordylines, Heliconia ‘Andromeda’ and Imperial bromeliad (*Alcantarea imperialis* ‘Rubra’) were grouped in a semi-formal arrangement to create impact through consistency, while



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The transparency of glass fencing provides a visual link between the pool and other outdoor spaces. We used sawn sandstone retaining wall blocks to introduce some natural texture and contrast, and reduce the need for massive concrete footings which can often stifle planting capacity in garden areas.

MAINTENANCE

This garden looks fantastic all year round due to the constant bursts of colour from the plant foliage alone, but the growing season between October and April offers the addition of tropical flowers from the gingers and heliconias, as well as the flourish of new growth.

Generally speaking, tropical gardens grow well if the soil structure and sub-surface layers are prepared well to begin with and only require a regular slow-release organic fertiliser two to three times per year. Pruning requirements are far less than other ornamental varieties and usually amount to the removal of old or dead stalks/flowers twice a year and cutting back cordylines if desired once a year. Also, tropical gardens do like to be mulched every 12-24 months if practical.

RESULT

With many different viewpoints such as the pool area, internal rooms, external entertaining areas and the street, the challenge in designing the garden was delivering the right mix of plants to achieve an exotic look no matter where you stand.



plants such as Bismarck palm (*Bismarckia nobilis*), variegated shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet* ‘Variegatum’) and lobster claw (*Heliconia rostrata*) were utilised for a more significant statement.

Some of the species like the cordylines, bromeliads, palms and liriopie are suited to a wider variety of climate zones, providing it is not too cool and there is definitely no frost, whereas species such as gingers, heliconias and some of the palms prefer subtropical to tropical climate zones, which in Australia is from Coffs Harbour to north Queensland and across to Perth, Geraldton and up to Broome in the west.

As with any landscape, it’s important to ensure the hardscape complements the home wherever possible, so cues were taken from the architecture of the house to ensure relevance. The fence closely resembles the building both in material and colour choice and creates a synergy that pervades the landscape extremities.

The entry paths utilise the same tiles used for the outdoor patio areas, while granite is featured to create contrast and provide lighter tones around the pool area.





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