

Place of retreat

A lush outdoor space that invites use and looks and feels like a private sanctuary

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garden profile

Perfectly situated on a subdivided battleaxe block in the Brisbane inner-city suburb of Hawthorne, literally a stone's throw from the river, this contemporary home had been thoughtfully designed. Like its neighbours, Balmoral and Bulimba, Hawthorne's past life featured semi-industrial businesses and workers' cottages, but today is a melting pot of landscape and architectural styles. The owners of this property are typical of the many young professional couples and families who live in Hawthorne: they wanted a landscape design that embraced everything the outdoors has to offer, despite the restricted plot size.

It was a chance meeting at a local school fete that gave rise to what would become a great working relationship between me and the owners of this beautiful garden. As owners of a very busy and successful design company and parents of a young son, my clients valued their spare time and appreciated the simplicity of relaxing at home. Their brief was typical of many of my clients: to create a space that invites outdoor use and looks and feels like a



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private sanctuary.

The site was flat and there was a dominating yellow rendered concrete block wall that usurped the view from every facing window. The sub-grade was very sandy and, as an extra challenge, construction had commenced on a two-storey home with a rooftop terrace only a few metres beyond the boundary wall. To make matters worse, there were no existing plants, let alone established trees, to screen the new construction. As part of the existing outdoor area, there was an in-ground pool and undercover entertainment area, however barbecuing pushed the space too far, so a separate cooking area was also required.

I set about designing a space that enabled

the resident soccer star to practise. Sir Walter lawn was chosen due to its drought and shade tolerance. To enable more diverse use of the space, three small niches were created using large-format pavers to match the existing paved areas. Merbau timber benches with a Sikkens finish were built on-site to provide an element of warmth and a variety of spots where the owners could relax. The outdoor barbecue area was also designed in a way that allowed a visual connection to the entertainment area, enabling the cook to feel part of any social occasion. This has now removed the clutter as well as barbecue smoke from the outdoor dining area.

The next priority was to deal with the block →



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wall. A dark charcoal tone was selected and has helped the wall to blend into the background nicely. To build on this, perimeter planting of Red Neck palms, frangipani and *Cordyline 'Pink Diamond'* was selected. As luck would have it, the owners of the new property sought our advice regarding a suitable plant for their side of the block wall, so Timor black bamboo (*Bambusa lako*) and Slender Weaver's bamboo (*Bambusa textilis gracilis*) was planted, providing a great borrowed landscape.

The speed at which the bamboo screen has established and continues to grow is fantastic. Of course, the sub-soil was vastly improved with rich imported organic soil to support the new plantings. Water tanks were installed for water harvesting in a convenient location behind the garage and connected to an automatic irrigation system.

One of the most enhancing components of the new landscape has to be the outdoor lighting. With stainless-steel fittings and remote activation at night, the owners now feel like they can bring the outside into their home and enjoy their investment even more.

With many months of use, it's fair to say the owners absolutely love using their garden and it has achieved everything they set out to accomplish for their outdoor area. ■

