

## GARDEN NOTES

### BIG HILL

'Big Hill' located at Christmas Hills in the Yarra Valley is a wonderful garden set on five hectares of bushland. There's a beautiful synergy between home, garden and natural surrounds. The garden is made up of approximately 60 per cent native plants, 20 per cent local indigenous species and 20 per cent exotics. The flat garden which sits on a hill covers around one hectare; the surrounding bush is downhill on all sides.

Eleven years ago we walked onto this piece of land, and knew then and there that it was a very special place to be. We both felt privileged to part of this space and still do, to this day. After 30 years as a rental property with the Melb & Metro Board of Works, the neglect was obvious. An old fibro shack, various sheds and a 1964 cream brick veneer house, with an agapanthus driveway, was to be our home.

In the beginning the north-sloping aspect was full of mature Radiata Pines and various other pest species, which we promptly removed. This made way for 100 truckloads of clay fill to extend a flat area to the north where the kitchen would eventually sit. From here, gardens evolved and buildings were constructed as a symbiotic relationship developed.

Initially five water holes were dug and we now have three full of water – the most recent sitting snugly within the hull of an old wooden boat conjoined with an enormous wharf timber wall to give seclusion and protection from the elements. Large basalt rock, recycled timbers and iron all work in unison to create a feeling of place around the water garden areas.

What we call the 'Island Garden' consists of a raised vegetable patch, courtyards and full-to-overflowing native garden borders. A spiral iron tower is adjacent to a gazebo which gives welcome respite from the sun. Large flat basalt rocks sit comfortably as steps, and also retain many aspects of this garden.

The beginnings of a succulent garden was started in a westerly aspect by the carport four or five years ago, and will continue to evolve around the cattle train carriage situated opposite. This area connects to the pergola with its huge granite table and bench seats below.

The front of the property facing east and overlooking the Yarra Valley is another area in the making. Plans are afoot as we discuss our visions of what 'could be'. Materials for the hard landscaping appear on a daily basis, and the picture of what plantings to choose emerges naturally.

All-and-all the collaboration on this property between hard landscape and plantings has an element of natural attrition, whereby Hamish and I install the 'bones' and I then 'clothe' them, placing all things in context to the other.

Let your imagination go, as you wander through our garden!

*Loretta and Hamish*