

GARDEN NOTES

Karkalla

Karkalla is the private home of garden designer Fiona Brockhoff, partner David Swann and family. The property is positioned on a tertiary dune approximately 200m from the ocean and borders the Mornington Peninsula National Park. This location informed and inspired the design from the outset. The use of plant species suited to the neutral soil, local limestone used for walls and compacted to make terraces, old pier timbers used for retaining walls, and the incorporation of wave weathered glass and shells that appear as incidental elements of the pavements, are just some elements of the design that strongly connect this garden to its location.

Upon entering the gate of Karkalla, with its recycled pier timber and limestone feature post, there is immediately a strong sense of place. The long driveway is designed to give a sense of moving over sand dunes and the adjacent indigenous planting feels as though it has naturally evolved. This belies the background of the site, which was heavily infested with weed species when it was purchased in 1994 and has been carefully designed, rehabilitated and maintained by Fiona and David.

A forecourt at the end of the driveway is paved with a local crushed limestone. Pier timbers and a specially designed exposed concrete with wave-weathered glass and shells reinforce the coastal connection on the path to the front door. Planting here is mainly of non-local species and architectural in appearance, to relate to the modernist architecture.

The house was designed by architect Thomas Isaksson from Sydney in association with Fiona to hark back to her childhood home and the 1950's beach houses from this area. The incorporation of large local limestone clad walls create a spine connecting the house to the landscape. The house offers not only family accommodation but also a home office above the car port from which David and Fiona are able to run their landscape design and construction businesses. With solar power, rainwater tanks and composting toilets the house is ecologically sensitive. There are alternative outdoor terraces extending from the house, so there is always somewhere sheltered to enjoy the garden. A second round of construction works saw a bungalow sensitively located in the garden.

By following a flight of steps parallel with the limestone wall in the forecourt, visitors gain access to the upper terrace. The terrace is an extension from the family space in the house with views over Port Phillip framed by pruned olive trees. Homemade concrete pavers provide the outdoor sitting space immediately to the north east of the house, but this more formal paving yields to an area of compacted fine granitic gravel. The movement of foliage sweeping this mulch gives it a life of its own, the surface patterns offering an attractive finish that could never be achieved by use of other mulches. Textural planting is dominant here and includes two forms of New Zealand Flax *Phormium tenax* and *P. 'Kiwi Dazzler'*, *Cordyline australis*, various succulent species and clipped shapes of *Westringia fruticosa* and the indigenous *Correa alba* and Sea Box, *Alyxia buxifolia*, a handsome shrub with shiny green leaves.

Fiona's interest in aboriginal art is reflected in the presence of a Tiwi Pukamani pole used in funeral services in Bathurst and Melville Islands. Dating from c1960, the pole is made from ironwood and decorated with traditional designs made from natural pigments. This sculpture anchors the terrace planting and provides focal interest.

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Reused pier timbers provide a retaining wall at the north-eastern edge of this terrace. This proves a vantage point to view the garden beyond and the broader borrowed landscape. Immediately below is a newly created dining and sitting terrace with a woodfired oven at its western end. This terrace is anchored strongly into the slope by rendered and stone walls and enjoys a view over a slope recently planted with English lavender and rosemary to provide fodder for the bee hives. Beyond again lies the chook shed and the organic vegetable garden and an orchard irrigated by grey water. The vegetables and chook run are some distance from the house along with Fiona's favourite cut flowers, dahlias. Herbs are closer to the kitchen, growing beneath the clothes line on a terrace to the east of the house.

The south courtyard of Karkalla features gravel terraces retained with pier timbers, an area for bocce and a sheltered outdoor dining area. Plants featured include Spear-grass, *Austrostipa stipoides*, Cushion Bush, *Leucophyta brownii*, Seabox, *Alyxia buxifolia*, Native Hibiscus, *Alyogyne heugelii*, Coast Banksia, *Banksia integrifolia*, Coast Sword-sedge, *Lepidospermum gladiatum* and White Correa, *Correa alba*. Fiona has tested the ability of indigenous species to respond to manipulation by clipping Moonahs *Melaleuca lanceolata*, She Oaks *Allocasuarina verticillata* and other shrubs into different topiary shapes in this courtyard.

The broader south western garden provides sites for sculpture, for example, 'Chimpanzee's Finger' by Lisa Roet and a homemade 'Thong Tree'. The latter provides a further reference to the coastal location of the garden. Similarly, a sculpture of washed up bottles and the round form of lobster pots discreetly located within planting masses reinforce the garden's seaside character. The most dramatic sculptural piece in the garden is 'Koonya Beach Columns' commissioned in 1997 from the New Zealand sculptor Chris Booth. The columns of stone are appropriate in scale and feel for their setting, viewed as they are against the background of the adjacent national park and Bass Strait. Planting in this south western section of the garden builds upon remnant native plants and provides habitat for native fauna. By utilising granitic sand as both a mulch and hard surface, the division between garden areas and walked areas is lost so that tussocks can form natural sweeps and masses.

As you move away from the rear courtyard the planting design and treatment of the plants become more irregular and natural. This creates a seamless transition between the house environs and the landscape beyond.

Apart from grey water applied to the vegetable garden and orchard, the garden at Karkalla is generally unirrigated. This has been achieved by selecting plants that are well able to grow in this Sorrento environment without supplementary care and providing mulched surfaces of both woodchip and fine granitic gravel.

Karkalla is located on the lands of the Bunurong people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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