

GARDEN NOTES

MELROSE

'Melrose' is a circa 1860s bluestone cottage. When acquired in 2005 by the current owner it had been derelict for some time. The garden comprised an original rose bed at the entrance, some shrubs on one side, a pear tree, an ornamental plum tree and a horse paddock! It was developed gradually over a number of years including during drought and extreme rain events. This influenced the design, with a view to creating an environment that would provide sanctuary and protection from the harsh climatic conditions and, by necessity, comprise robust plantings. The garden has been designed with a mix of elements - with some formality and symmetry, some romance and wildness, a mingling of ornamentals and productive plants, and the use of local recycled materials and artifacts from overseas.

A **courtyard** around the living and dining areas was designed to provide shade from the western and northern sun in summer, and light in winter. Grape vines are trained along a pergola that stretches across the courtyard so that there is a canopy of leaves (and grapes) in summer, allowing the doors of the house to be left open for breezes and fresh air. Fragrance comes from the star jasmine and citrus flowers. The design is Mediterranean-oriented, with iron windows from Turkey and a Tuscan gravel surface. A fish pond sits in the center and helps create a feeling of coolness during summer.

An old lean-to kitchen cottage was relocated from the bluestone house to the far corner of the property to use as a **gardener's shed** for planning and contemplating. This provided an opportunity to create a vegetable garden in front of the shed as if it were an independent living space with its own garden. Four beds are bordered on two sides by espaliered heritage apples and the entire garden is enclosed. A rose arbour entrance leads into the vegetable garden with privet hedging on either side. The pathways have been made with recycled bricks from the original chimney attached to the cottage.

Next to the shed and vegetable garden, a **chicken house** has been built, with a similar pitch to the shed at right angles to it and set at a level to allow storage underneath. Fruit trees were established in the enclosed run before the chickens were introduced, to create shade and also for access by the chickens to fallen fruit. A Barnevelder chicken family now live here - Anja and Eva - but they have also expanded their territory to include the vegetable garden. So, a challenge has been working out ways for chickens and vegetables to co-exist, hence cloches and enclosures for the vegetables.

The **pool** is on the other side of the privet hedge. The aim was to integrate the pool into the garden landscape to create the sense of a pond instead of a traditional formal pool separated by paving from any garden elements. Plantings go up to and over the side of the pool and incorporate grasses to help create the feel of a natural water feature. In another departure from traditional pool design, the pool area includes many productive elements - espaliered apples, a nectarine and quinces, as well as perennials, tamarisk and myrtle trees. Recycled sleepers form the northern wall and iron decorative doors from India provide a feature at the front of the equipment area.

The **pool shed** was inspired by the hay sheds of Central Victoria. The structure uses bush poles, recycled sleepers from the railways, recycled corrugated iron (including from the original derelict stables on the property) and recycled bricks.

It is used to relax by the pool during the day and as an entertainment space in the evening. The shed was featured in garden photographer Simon Griffiths' *Shed* publication. Beyond the northern pool wall, the sloping **paddock** was terraced with low bluestone retaining walls, built to integrate with the bluestone cottage.

GARDEN NOTES

The Mediterranean aesthetic was continued with graveled pathways, pencil pines, *Elaeagnus x ebbingei*, rosemary and echiums, but also productive plants including olives, pistachios, a mulberry, artichokes, cardoons, and pomegranate hedges. More recently a gravel garden was introduced.

The remainder of the garden rambles around the house, including an area of mixed plantings in winding beds to soften the outside of the pool fence, a spreading apricot tree, a nectarine tree and peach tree, with Tuscan gravel pathways throughout. A visitor coined the term “*wild chic garden*”. The garden is featured in Simon Griffiths’ book *Garden Love*, as well as appearing on Gardening Australia and Better Homes and Gardens.

Of interest is how the garden has evolved over time - the structure has stayed the same but the plantings have changed.

- An experimental **gravel garden** was introduced a number of years ago towards the front of the property which has settled in since the last open garden - feature plants include Mexican Lily (*Beschorneria yuccoides*) flowering for the first time last year, Echium sp. and Honeybush (*Melianthus major* ‘Antonow’s Blue’).
- Early this year we finally gave up our attachment to the original lavender plants in the **rose garden**. This provided an opportunity to introduce perennials and also a border of Westringia ‘Aussie Box’ which will hedge up over time.
- The **verge garden** has been significantly revamped – not so much the Mediterranean section with the olives and serpentine privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) hedge, but immediately in front of the house. A unifying plant is the Mexican Lily. The upper section primarily is a mix of native and exotic perennials and New Zealand wind grass (*Stipa arundinacea*). The lower section to the north is primarily a mix of native and exotic shrubs with Panicum Virgatum ‘Iron Maiden’. Most, although not all, of the plantings are relatively new so this will be its first spring.
- The **east side** has always been difficult with the large street trees pulling out the moisture and nutrients. This area was not specifically developed with the rest of the garden, but existing shrubs retained. A couple of years ago we introduced some under-planting of Box Honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*) which will eventually fill out the space, along with the existing Mahonia sp. that is now spreading. Further to the south the colour tones of the existing exotic shrubs have been complemented with Chef’s Hat Correa (*Correa baeuerlenii*) - a correa that looks more exotic than native, together with False Heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*), and a mix of varieties of strappy Lily-turf (*Liriope muscari*). This has been repeated under the Himalayan Birches (*Betula utilis* ‘Jacquemontii’).

No doubt the garden will continue to evolve as plants grow, conditions change and new ideas form!

Melrose is located on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au