

THE OAKS

The Oaks at 8 Gillies Street North Lake Wendouree has been an evolution of European gardens since 1856.

From a swamp where the Wadawurrang and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples gathered by the swamp, (now called *Lake Wendouree*), then onto the guardianship of Fenwick & Sarah Hamilton who purchased land in 1856 and established a homestead called *St Ernan's*. On the outskirts of Ballarat, *St Ernan's* had a long driveway from the foreshore of Lake Wendouree to a grand weatherboard house with impressive gardens (that were notably opened to the public in 1897 for a Strawberry Fête). *St Ernan's* was segmentally broken down over years and was finally sold in 1914.

1921 – 1984 witnessed the building of social housing (*Hassall Homes*) which were eventually managed by Legacy for Air Force widows. The current owners of *The Oaks* can retell stories of grandmothers that lived in these cottages and the grandchildren who could recall 'playing under large oak trees' and the 'dastardly prickly hedges'.

In 1984 a developer purchased the six blocks opposite Ballarat High School and the derelict cottages were demolished. The proposed development failed and the current owners bought the land in 1989. The next evolution was ***The Oaks***.

The prickly old Hawthorn hedge, (*Crataegus monogyna*) that the 'children' remember, runs along Gillies St North as well as the northern divide along a stormwater easement and was part of *the nesting hedges* in the 1920s. But more significantly are the remaining English oak trees.

An arborist's history tells of 100 oak trees that were reportedly brought out from England by the Hamiltons around 1860. This places our four oaks and the 'sibling oaks' in neighbours' gardens as well as into the *Ballarat Botanical Gardens*, at around 160 years old. The lifespan of an English oak (*Quercus robur*) in Australia is 300-400 years.

Four of these oak trees are an integral part of our garden, thus the name. Nothing has been built or planted without recognition of their importance.

The first contemporary landscape design of ***The Oaks*** was in 1989 by Jeremy Drew & Associates. One of the first considerations from the outset was the entrance to ***The Oaks*** and car parking with the large stone driveway designed to be sympathetic to the roots of the oak trees. A well-established *Luma* hedge now grows along the entire length of this driveway to the garage door of Oregon timber.

The house was positioned at the south west corner of the block allowing for an expanse of north east garden as well as a north south tennis court.

The concept was designed much in the manner of a 'stroll garden', offering a variety of experiences and allowing for a range of activities for generations of family living. The meandering path of light coloured Seymour topping provides a vista for the eye but provides many opportunities to step off the path to engage in yet another garden treasure.

The design was careful to blend a feeling of spaciousness with a scale that is quite intimate. Depth was provided by views over foreground planting to the distant aspects of the garden where ornamental trees were planted - each for its inherent beauty. A Manchurian Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*); a spectacularly straight, smooth, white bark Eucalyptus tree (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) is planted with the less formal branches of a Pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) nearby; a Weeping Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*); a Weeping Scots Elm (*Ulmus glabra* – weeping form), and a *Magnolia Grandiflora* are just some of the trees planted in 1989.

Scorched by drought, a bore was needed in 2006 to keep the oaks and the other significant trees and shrubs watered. In 2011 a family wedding saw some work around the garden, but nothing of any consequence. (The drought did break... on the day of the wedding!) By 2020 the owners thought more love and vigour needed to be ploughed into the garden. Enter **The Scape Artist**, headed up by the talented Paddy Milne.

The Scape Artist and his team gave new life to *The Oaks* garden. While plants under the oak trees had never been successful, Paddy managed the process to improve the areas under the canopies with additional irrigation and fresh garden soil. Now there are multiple Dogwoods (*Cornus alternifolia*); generous clusters of *Hellebores*; smatterings of Clivias and wobbly little orange *Abutilon* as well as whimsical *Cymbopogon citratus* and rows of *Arthropodium Matapouri Bay*.

Paddy spoke of plant choices that were based around the 'parkland' feel of the garden to begin with. Given the size of the area, Paddy presented us with the opportunity to include a wide variety of plant types and 'lean into the idea of our own scaled version of a botanical garden' including the owners' penchant for red, orange and purple that has been integrated with the vibrant colour palette set off with the use of white and different shades of green through the seasons.

Our numerous Japanese Maples (*Acer palmatum*), that have been gifts over the years, forming a small maple grove in the south west garden area, have been given new vivacity with an abundance of *Fuchsias*, *Hydrangeas* and Purple Mist flowers (*Bartlettina sordida*) and the rows of white *Camellia Sasanqua*.

The Oaks is a garden that has been revitalised for family lifestyle that speaks to curious and active children. In 1989 it was for our family with four children and their many friends and cousins, to be able to enjoy a safe and constantly evolving character. Today the needs and delights include our grandchildren. With *The Scape Artist's* understanding the garden remains the excitement domain of summer water slides, cricket, football, basketball and cycling around the entire border track... that has time trials still challenged. The tennis can be taken seriously while the toddlers scoot around the garden beds on trikes and scooters.

Many 'Alfresco pseudo-dining' opportunities have been set up around the new sundial garden space near the birdbath. The large and spectacular lawn provides the scene of cartwheels and ball sports, as well as many picnics. And, not to forget the revamped water feature that provides the site for 'water painting' and safe exploration as well as an auditory focus of moving water.

From the tired garden of 2020 to the delight it is in 2025. The intuitive flow of garden beds with inventive planting has been getting more joyful with each season. But, without a doubt the most creative and resourceful 'brand new' section that Paddy Milne has introduced has been the intriguing vertical garden wall. Herbs, berries and lettuces offer not only a wall of beauty, but the fresh pickings for mealtime just outside the laundry door. Positioned in what was the 'forgotten' south side of the house has been transformed.

The Oaks is an oasis in a busy urban area. Whether sitting on the terraces, or under the trees or in the middle of the lawn, the evolution of *The Oaks* will go on while the fun, the tranquillity and the beauty remain constant.

The Oaks is located on the lands of the Wadawurrung People. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land 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



The Oaks Plant & Tree Species

Quercus robur	Azalea
Gleditsia	Pelargonium 'Big Red'
Betula 'youngii'	Salvia 'Scarlet'
Magnolia grandiflora	Agastache 'Lavender'
Schinus molle	Rhodanthe anthemoides
Ulmus glabra	Hydrangea 'Annabelle'
Cercis 'Forest Pansy'	Heuchera 'Firefly'
Cornus 'June Snow'	Heuchera 'Fire Alarm'
Cornus 'Red Beauty'	Anemone nemorosa
Prunus 'Snofozam'	Arthropodium 'Matapouri Bay'
Lagerstroemia 'Red Hot'	Clivia
Acer 'Inaba Shidare'	Bartlettina sordida
Cornus 'Sibirica'	Rosmarinus 'prostrate'
Chaenomeles	Sutera 'Snowflake'
Viburnum Snowball	Trachelospermum 'Flat Matt'
Philadelphus 'Virginal'	Stachys byzantina
Euonymus Alatus	Ajuga reptans
Berberis 'Little Favourite'	Viola hederacea
Digitalis purpurea	Pratia pedunculata
Agastache lavender	Dichondra repens
Achillea Walter Funcke	
Rosa Avon	
Abutilon 'Orange'	
Daphne odora	
Rhododendron	
Penstemon Midnight	
Nepta Walker's Blue	
Salvia leucantha	
Salvia nemorosa	
Helleborus Hot Flash	
Helleborus Ice N Roses	
English and Korean Buxus	
Nandina Obsession	