

GARDEN NOTES

Sanctuary

Welcome to our little Sanctuary here in the Bayside suburb of Hampton.

Located 800m from the bay, and a short walk from the shops and our teenager's school, our aim was to create a space that would provide refuge and relaxation for busy lives. When we purchased the subdivided block four years ago, the backyard was what I call a 'cricket-pitch' garden. A rectangle of lawn with some hedging shrubs skirting the perimeter. We knew we needed to make the compact space work much harder and entice us into its corners. The wish list included a new pool, fire pit area, BBQ and some green space for our kelpie Asher. My mother has been educating her kids and championing native gardens for many years, so the choice of plant pallet was never in question.

As an industrial designer and keen gardener, I got to work sketching a multitude of layouts before personally undertaking the build (watch the build on [YouTube here](#)) One of the biggest challenges was that the block has no side access. This meant that every element used in the garden, including the pool, needed to come through the house! Due to the flat, rectangular layout I was also keen to create layers via changes in height with the hard landscaping as well as a sense of journeying to different zones. Raising the pool at the rear of the block helped create this change in elevation, but also halved the depth of excavation and therefore spoil that needed to be removed from the site. The raised deck that gives access to the pool enabled the pools plant equipment to be hidden from view under its steps. The team at Momentum Pools need to be applauded for their ingenuity in devising a scaffolding system over the roof of the side of the house. This enabled materials and concrete to be brought in and the removal of the soil via individual red buckets and a tile escalator to a wheelbarrow across the top of the scaffold. It was a mammoth undertaking.

Making a feature of the raised walkway to the pool helps to draw guests deeper into the block past the various zones and the feature garden bed on the right. The seating cut into the existing deck, which leads to the raised garden on the left, helps to tie in the old and new portion of the hard landscaping and gives the fire pit a sunken feeling. We are happy to find that we do tend to migrate through the space during a gathering with friends, from inside, to the back deck, to sitting around the fire, to eventually a glass of wine in the heated pool looking back at the house. We have also found the kids wanting to invite their friends to spend time in the garden which as parents of teenagers is considered a big tick.

One of the most striking and potentially controversial elements of the garden is the decision to place a very large *Angophora costata* tree, slap bang in the middle of the space. This was influenced by the memory of a very large Fig tree my siblings and I used to play around in my grandparents' house in South Africa. It also provides natural dappled shade to the seating given the northerly aspect and is central to the

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eco-system of the garden. It is also a way for the garden to give back to the local area with the reintroduction of a generous canopy to the skyline. We also chose the specific location keeping in mind its eventual size without infringing on the neighbours space. It acts to divide the garden and give it a sense of foreground versus background, creating added depth.

Besides the Angophora, we planted the garden with some mature specimens, namely the two *Eucalyptus caesia*, and four *Banksia integrifolia* 'Sentinels' along the back fence. These seven specimens help give this young garden the illusion of being a lot older than it actually is. Repetition in both colour and variety of the planting is another mechanism used to simplify and create coherence in such a compact space. Yellow kangaroo paws, are reflected left and right as is the silver foliage of the *Senecio mandraliscae*, *Euc pulverulenta*, *Euc pleurocarpa* and Silver Princesses. The multitude of *Austrastipa stipoides* grasses, punctuated by *Corea baueri* and *Corea alba*, along the footbridge carries the viewers eye down the right side to the pool.

A desire to add more specimens and let's face it, do more nursery shopping, was fulfilled by a collection of large pots on the deck which have been used to rotate and trial different plant combinations over the years. Being a block surrounded by three imposing fences has been an important design challenge. Currently this is addressed by *Hibertia scandens* trained against the left-hand fence as well as a newly introduced vertical garden beside the living room. An internal garden was also introduced outside the laundry by removing half the deck. Visible from the kitchen, it provides an oasis of greenery where once it was dry and barren.

We continue to enjoy the garden as it matures and changes under the ever-growing canopy of the larger specimens. It provides a year-round visual dance of foliage and texture with very little maintenance and has already proven to be the sanctuary and nurturing respite needed during these last challenging Covid years. We hope you find some ideas and inspiration also.

On show during your visit will be a selection of my limestone sculptures. (Some available for purchase). You can see them here via my [website](#) or Instagram handle [@dmvdm](#).

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