

GARDEN NOTES

Sunnymeade

This garden belongs to Peter and Simone Shaw. Together they run *Ocean Road Landscaping* and this is the story of Sunnymeade.

We fell in love with the land one Sunday afternoon as we strolled past midway through the year 2000. With our one-year-old strapped to my chest and a second child barely 16 weeks old inside Simone, we were a young family in the making, looking for a place to call home. By the time we had the house designed and built, we were a family of five, a few years later we were six, with two sons and two daughters in that order.

The twisted stringybarks (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) that gracefully stand on the site evoked a sense of magic that influenced the garden on all levels. The house was built at the end of the block enabling all the trees to stay just as they were. The free-form design reflects the natural twisting shapes in the trunks and works its way under the trees. The trees provided an opportunity for children's play and cubby houses, adding to the childhood magic we wanted to create. The plants selected for under the trees needed to be tough and drought tolerant. Once we worked out what would grow, we simply repeated the patterns. The imposed plant palette brings a sense of calm as it repeats itself throughout the garden. We wanted to have a garden that was relaxed, fun for the kids and suitable for everyday family life - after all a garden is for living in. The materials selected needed to reflect the garden's character and feel like they belonged. We selected the timbers for decking and fencing and stone was selected based on the colour, along with gravel, shell grit and river pebbles. All the materials needed to sit comfortably together along with the weathered timber building.

I can understand why people say the mechanic's car never gets a service and the landscaper's garden is never finished. Overcoming the barriers to "do it for ourselves" was rather difficult when running a business and having four young lives intertwined with ours. Together we had some great ideas however, even as a professional landscape designer, I wanted to collaborate with a creative design team. We made a call to Jim Sinatra and Phin Murphy from *Sinatra Murphy*. I had first met them through a project in Jan Juc a few years earlier that went on to be an award-winning garden. We met our architect Luke Middleton of EME Design on the same project, who designed the house. Jim and Phin spent a day working on a garden design idea that felt strong and happy to work with. The main focus was more structure close to the house and more relaxed further away. After discussing ideas with Luke, we had a sense of cohesion.

The work started with excavations and footings for all the stone walls. As infrastructure went in, we lived in an environment of trenches, piles of dirt and rock. The kids loved this phase more than we did as they played with all the piles quite happily. The trenches slowly filled and the digging ended, however, the stone piles continued for the next four years as the walls were slowly built. The living screen structure was installed at this time, along with the clothesline and the deck. Finally, a day arrived when all the old stone was gathered up and removed, freeing up the front of the site. The soft landscape came next with the installation of the main lawn, vegetable gardens and garden plantings out the front. Time worked with us now, and as the garden began to grow, so did our enjoyment.

The garden on the east side of the drive has become known as the Sacred Garden. This is because it is a reference to what was on the site before we moved in. It's the only true part of the natural bush block left.

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Along with many interesting indigenous plants, a flush of orchids come up in this garden in late winter and spring. We have infill planted with indigenous plants to help fill some gaps.

The influence on the garden of one of our architects was the alignment of the garage with the building. Luke's idea was to bring the garden into the house and anchor the garage to the landscape with the use of the strong lines in the form of a wall. Jim and Phin took that challenge on and turned it into a living screen. The plan was to use a contrasting plant to the green-grey tones of the coastal garden, something bright and bold - we settled on Bougainvillea Scarlet O'Hara.

After living with a flat lawn for several years, I decided it was time for a change. Nothing at Sunnymeade has been done in an ordinary way. We feel this is a part of the charm of the garden. It's been a dream to have a sculpted lawn which came from my greenkeeping days. The logical thing was to take the levels up, partly because the tree roots were sucking a lot of moisture out of the old lawn and partly for the opportunity to sculpt with earth and grass. This addition has brought a new dimension to the way the family uses the space. You are welcome to pull up a patch of grass and sit between the hills.

It's safe to say that all gardens are never finished, they are just going through their current stage. This is how we feel about our garden, it's an ongoing process that we can play a part in as time moves on and as our needs and experiences change. Our garden would not be a reality if not for the help, design ideas, upkeep and hard work of the people who work at Ocean Road Landscaping.

Ocean Road Landscaping is a company that designs, constructs and offers garden care, a business that has been established for 26 years. The company has won various awards for its designs and business values.

In 2021 Peter's long-awaited book **Soulscape** was released and is available here at the open garden, from all good book stores and the ORL website.

<https://www.orl.com.au/product/soulscape-connecting-gardens-to-landscape/>

The garden has been seen on:

- Dream Gardens 2021 <https://iview.abc.net.au/video/FR1706H001S00>
- ABCs Gardening Australia in March 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/gardening/factsheets/seaside-sanctuary/10950396>
- The Design Files and the Plant Hunter. <http://thedesigntfiles.net/2017/05/peter-shaw-sunnymeade/>
- Australia By Design Chanel 10 <https://www.australiabydesign.com.au/abd-landscapes-2019/>
- In 2014 Sunnymeade won the Victorian Landscape Awards - Plants in Landscape

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:

www.opengardensvictoria.org.au