

GARDEN NOTES

Samantha

Planning for the landscape at 'Samantha' began in late 2016 when *Fiona Brockhoff Design* was engaged to design a landscape around a newly built holiday home designed by *Ray Dinh Architects*. This half-acre site (2150 square metres) is positioned in a low-lying area of Portsea, about halfway between Port Phillip and the ocean beaches of Bass Strait. It is situated south of the Portsea lagoon and its low-lying position affords excellent protection from the wind, as well as views of the lagoon. Over time, organic matter has also accumulated here resulting in deep and reasonably rich sandy topsoil.

Being low-lying also had its challenges since the water table is high, especially over winter. As a result the finished height of the swimming pool needed to be higher than initially planned. This ultimately worked to advantage since the pool and its associated timber decking float above the ground plane in a sea of coastal tussocks and shrubs. Glimpses of water can be seen from the house and the reflection of trees and sky create a magical atmosphere.

The single storey, L-shaped timber house is situated towards the rear of the site which created a large space in front of the house to the north. It is in this area that the majority of the garden exists: the pool, where it receives maximum solar radiation, a large in-ground trampoline, a private circular slate terrace on which to relax (also with a fire pit), a large buffalo lawn for active play and parking for several vehicles. The large natural shaped plantings in this area soften the house, screen the driveway and provide shade, year round interest and encourage birdlife. There is also room for a small herb garden.

There were several existing tree specimens that were retained and 'cleaned up' to advantage. These included several *Lagunaria patersonia* (Norfolk Island Hibiscus), two *Melaleuca armillaris* and a very sculptural *Leptospermum laevigatum* (Coastal Tea tree) copse which sadly is suffering due to possum damage. There are many trees on all the neighbouring properties also and these provide a backdrop and framework in which the garden rests. This borrowed landscape is important in that it extends the garden beyond its boundaries.

Where possible, locally sourced materials were used in the construction of the hard landscape: slate from Pyrenees quarries in Castlemaine, Dromana granitic toppings for the gravelled areas, recycled timber components from the Portsea pier as sculptural elements and a large number of locally grown plants with indigenous provenance. This sustainable approach significantly reduced its energy footprint during construction and this continues in its care and upkeep. The use of local materials gives the garden a strong sense of place and belonging to its coastal site. Using plants indigenous to the Mornington Peninsula and other Australian species also help create a strong local flavour and encourages local wildlife to visit. And since the local indigenous species in particular have evolved here, they are perfectly suited to the given conditions. This means they require less interference to grow well.

Some of the tree species used include: *Agonis flexuosa* 'Burgundy' (Burgundy Willow Myrtle), *Banksia integrifolia* (Coast Banksia), *Callistemon* 'Slim', *Leptospermum laevigatum* (Coastal Tea- tree) and *Tetrapanax papyrifer* (Rice Paper Plant).

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Shrubs include: *Alyxia buxifolia* (Seabox), *Correa alba* (White Correa), *Correa* 'Marian's Marvel', *Correa reflexa* (Native Fuchsia), *Westringia fruticosa* (Coastal Rosemary), *Echium fastuosum*, *Melianthus major* (Giant Honey Flower), *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*, *Pomaderris paniculosa* subsp. *paralia*, *Helichrysum microphyllum*.

Tussocks include: *Austrostipa stipoides* (Prickly Spear-grass), *Dianella brevicaulis* (Coast Flax-lily), *Phormium* 'Anna Red' along with other green forms of *Phormium*, *Poa poiformis* var. *ramifer* and *Arthropodium cirrhatum* recently introduced to cope with the increased amount of shade.

Groundcovers include: *Correa reflexa* var. *nummulariifolia*, *Plectranthus canus*, *Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Blue Lagoon', *Pratia pedunculata* and others including *Aeonium undulatum* and *Canna* 'Tropicanna'

Seas of tussocks and sweeps of shrubs combine to reflect the local coastal character and dune ecosystem in particular. The planting design is more about foliage texture and colour and plant habit, thus does not rely on the sensation of flower colour, which can be fleeting and unreliable. Flowers are often insignificant or a bonus, heralding Spring.

The hole for the pool was excavated in May 2017 and the concrete shell poured soon after in June. At this stage ABC *Dreams Gardens 2* (a television series based on the Grand Designs model) started filming the process of design and construction, which involved the clients, the landscape contractor David Swann and Fiona Brockhoff Design. All three parties were interviewed at various stages of construction over 2017, with the final reveal being filmed another year later at the end of 2018 once plants had begun to establish. This second series went to air at the end of October 2019.

'Samantha' is a garden that is casual in style and for the family to live in and enjoy. Importantly it is functional, but beautiful, and takes advantage of its superb location offering a variety of experiences for ages young and old and local wildlife also.

Samantha 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.

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