



GARDEN NOTES

HIGHETT GARDEN

Notes from the Garden Designer, Stephen Read

The approach to designing a garden on a new block is very different from when updating an existing garden. Projects that start with a blank canvas lack context and visual cues. It is necessary to 'build a story' from scratch; but it is also a challenge to imagine a space that doesn't exist.

I was lucky to have clients with strong ideas on what they wanted to achieve, so we were able to build the story together. The plants they loved – particularly figs and olives – were productive, and others such as the pencil pines were growing next door. We were able to develop a strong link between the house and the surrounding gardens, giving the vacant site a context. It is always important to link a suburban house with the street – however in this situation, the owners also wanted some privacy.

A sweeping curve of timber bollards direct visitors to the front gate. The bollards effectively create a 'translucent' screen which visually protects the house from the street while maintaining a sense of openness and connection with the neighbours. From the front garden a distinctive olive indicates the direction to be taken to explore the garden. Moving down the north side of the property a lush and productive kitchen garden is revealed. Further through a narrow gate is the back garden. The west-facing garden is divided in two. The garden off the living rooms provides a semi-shaded nook. The olives provide shelter from the afternoon sun as well as screening the view of the next door property. The adjacent courtyard is filled with light and links to a meditation-yoga room within the house. The deck stretches into the garden inviting a feeling of contemplation. Hardy perennials provide colour and movement and combine to provide a place to sit and feel a part of the garden.

Notes from the Garden Owner

Having decided to build a completely new house on an entirely empty block within an established residential area, we engaged Stephen as soon as the preliminary drawings for the new dwelling were created. This was with the intention to give Stephen not only as much time as possible to design the future garden, but also to allow him to provide inputs to the actual building plans where relevant from a garden-design perspective, such as placement and size of windows and external doors, orientation for external light as well water tank, taps and irrigation.

Our key objectives for the garden-to-be were: use of native and drought-tolerant plants; privacy and shielding from overlooking by neighbours; having an area (unaccessible to our dog!) for fruit and vegetable growth, as well as low-maintenance overall. Stephen's design seamlessly combined these requirements, and we are extremely happy with how he has translated seemingly bold ideas (for instance no lawn and massive wooden bollards in lieu of front fence) into a very attractive reality. Apart from the fantastic outcome, what stood out in the overall process was Stephen's dedication and effort he put into the design and build, and the quality of contractors he engaged to undertake the actual work. Stephen also continues to support us in the ongoing establishment of the garden.

We hope you enjoy visiting our garden.

Cheers, Lutz

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