

GARDEN NOTES

KARKALLA

Two significant features dominate the Karkalla garden. The first is the 1950s-inspired house designed in 1995 by architect Thomas Isaksson from Sydney in association with Fiona to hark back to the beach houses of her childhood. The incorporation of large limestone clad walls act as a spine linking the house to the landscape and reinforcing its coastal location.

Cleverly the house offers not only family accommodation but also a splendid home-office above the car port from which David and Fiona are able to run their landscape design and construction businesses. With solar heating and composting toilets the house is ecologically sensitive but, as might be expected, it also provides the central core for much of the garden design with the front entry a focus to the arrival area and outdoor terraces extending from the house. A second round of construction works saw a bungalow sensitively located in the garden.

The second dominant feature is its coastal setting. There are obvious aspects to this, such as the use of suitable plants, but there are other more subtle qualities like wave-weathered glass and shells that appear as 'incidental' elements of the gravel mulch and old pier timbers that have provided much of the construction material for the site. It is the restraint and subtlety with which these elements have been handled that confer so much of the charm on the garden.

A forecourt at the end of the driveway is paved with a local crushed limestone and pier timbers provide a step to separate the path to the front door from the drive. Planting here is mainly exotic and architectural in appearance.

By following a flight of steps parallel with the retaining wall visitors gain access to the upper terrace, an extension from the family space in the house. Homemade concrete pavers complete with an exposed aggregate of shell-grit provide the outdoor seating space immediately to the north-east of the house, but this more formal paving yields to an area of compacted fine granitic gravel.

The movement of foliage sweeping this mulch gives it a life of its own – the surface patterns offering an attractive finish that could never be achieved by use of other mulches. Textural planting is dominant here again with Mediterranean Spurge (*Euphorbia characias* ssp. *wulfenii* and *Euphorbia characias* ssp. *characias*) presenting together with two forms of New Zealand Flax ('Purpleum' and 'Kiwi Dazzler'), White Correa (*Correa alba*) and the indigenous Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*) – a handsome shrub with shiny green leaves.

Fiona's interest in Indigenous art is reflected in the presence of a Tiwi Pukamani pole used in funeral services in Bathurst and Melville Islands. Dating from about 1960, the pole is made from ironwood and decorated with traditional designs made from natural pigments.

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Vertical pier timbers provide a retaining wall at the north-eastern edge of this terrace. This proves an excellent vantage point to view the vineyard of Pinot Noir vines, the chook shed and the formal organic vegetable garden and orchard irrigated by greywater. While the vegetables are some distance from the house, herbs are closer to hand, growing beneath the clothesline.

The south-western garden of Karkalla also follows the form of the house with terraces in different levels paralleling the structural lines of the house. These terraces provide sites for sculpture; for example the colourful thong sculpture. It provides a further charming reference to the coastal location of the garden.

Similarly a sculpture of washed-up bottles and the round form of lobster pots discreetly located within planting masses reinforce the garden's seaside character. The most dramatic sculptural piece in the garden is 'Koonya Beach Columns' commissioned in 1997 from the New Zealand sculptor Chris Booth. The columns of stone are appropriate in scale and feel for their setting, viewed as they are against the background of the adjacent national park and Bass Strait. Planting in this south-western section of the garden builds upon remnant native plants and provides habitat for native fauna. By utilising granitic sand as both a mulch and paving surface, the division between gardened areas and walked areas is almost concealed so that tussocks can form natural sweeps and masses.

Spear grass (*Austrostipa stipoides*) is dominant here. Inevitably for coastal south-eastern Australia the Cushion Bush (*Leucophyta brownii*) is here with Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*), Native Hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii* 'West Coast Gem'), Coastal Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*), White Correa (*Correa alba*) and Coast Everlasting (*Ozothamnus turbinatus*).

The use of native planting suggests an overwhelming informal 'bush' style scheme yet the garden breaks away from this mould by retaining formal spaces, such as the bocce court – where the balls themselves offer a sculptural feature – and by the use of native plants clipped into formal shapes. Both Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) and Coastal She-oak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) have been handled in this way.

Apart from greywater applied to the vegetable garden, orchard and vines, the garden at Karkalla is not irrigated. This has been achieved by selecting plants that are perfectly adapted to the local environment without supplementary care.