



GARDEN NOTES

KOSTOS GARDEN

This Apartment House in Kooyong Road, Toorak was designed by Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA) and built in 2012. The landscaping, by Fiona Brockhoff Design, soon followed with the majority of the planting taking place in winter 2013.

The site presented many challenges: 'Toorak clay' and poor drainage, overlooking issues from neighbours on both sides, a prominent house to screen on the downhill side, a shady south-east facing rear garden, and a front garden with a very hot north-westerly aspect exposed to an expanse of road bitumen.

The solution for screening the neighbours was to plant bamboo *Bambusa textilis* 'Gracilis' (a clumping variety) which has come into its own, thriving in the heavier soil. This was planted on all three boundaries as soon as the house was finished and the earth shaping completed to give the screening a head start.

The front 'street garden' has no fence and this creates a strong interface with the street and any passers-by. Height and shade in the front is provided by a *Jacaranda mimosifolia* and *Lagerstroemia indica* that thrive in the heat. The front boundary is defined by a hedge of *Murraya paniculata* and behind this the planting is designed to create year-round interest with plants such as *Miscanthus transmorrisonensis*, *Garrya elliptica*, *Camellia sasanqua* 'Plantation Pink', *Hydrangea quercifolia* and ground covers of *Ajuga* 'Jungle Beauty' and *Cotoneaster dammeri*.

Visitors are drawn past this planting and into the entrance via a slate patio and to a gate of almost transparent mesh. This mesh forms a lovely 'veil' between the street and the entry area and provides security without disruption of sight lines through the garden from front to rear. Once through this mesh gate, visitors proceed to either the downstairs apartment or up a flight of bluestone tread stairs to a second home.

These stairs travel up through a courtyard dominated by Himalayan Birches (*Betula utilis* 'Jacquemonti') – their papery, peeling bark echoing the colour of the cream brick used in construction of the house.

This very shady garden beneath is planted with lush green species including *Fatsia japonica*, Bird's Nest Ferns (*Asplenium nidus*), Ginger Lilies (*Hedychium gardnerianum*), *Clivia nobilis* and *Clivia miniata* (brought from the owners last home) and Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*) and *Helleborus orientalis* as ground covers. Species were chosen throughout to give this garden an Oriental feel.

Much of the rear garden is viewed from the terrace at the top of these stairs and the garden is designed with this in mind.

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



Two tiers were designed in the rear garden and these useable level terraces were created using much of the slate and honeycomb rock from the original garden in the construction of the retaining walls and paths. The useable surfaces are topped with seas of fine granitic gravel from Hillview Quarries in Dromana and provide a soft surface underfoot.

Himalayan Birches are repeated as feature *trees* against the bamboo and together with other layers of textured foliage. Additional seasonal highlights are provided by *Berberis julianae*, *Hydrangea quercifolia*, *Abutilon* x hybrid, *Magnolia* x soulangeana 'Vulcan', *Miscanthus transmorrisonensis* and other shrubs. Ground interest is provided by the beautiful weeping mounds of *Liriope* 'Emerald Cascade', *Anemone japonica*, more *Helleborus* sp. and *Cotoneaster dammeri*, which cascades down the retaining walls.

A water feature made from an old Balinese metal cauldron ameliorates the sound of the freeway traffic and takes centre stage. Other eclectic sculptural elements and pieces of furniture have been chosen by the owners and give the garden its own sense of style and personality.

Overall the planting design concentrates on foliage texture and colour and plant habit with flowers providing added interest or 'bonuses' at various times of the year. However one of the biggest challenges in creating this garden was to include species that were happy to thrive in all three areas and provide continuity – the hot front, the central deeply-shaded courtyard and the sheltered shady rear garden. There are probably four or five species that thrive in all three areas with success.

This garden provides an oasis from the outside world for the owners where the property boundaries are disguised and interest and sanctuary are provided within. There is always something to admire or pick for a vase in the house.