

Contrasts in foliage colour, shape and texture give this 50-square-metre space a greater sense of depth and the illusion of space. Cloud-pruned junipers, a row of white bird of paradise and an olive hedge give structure and height, while the mounded forms of *Rhaphiolepis indica* 'Oriental Pearl' provide a green backdrop, allowing opportunities for punctuations of silver and burgundy. The Endicott crazy pavers are from Eco Outdoor.

urban paradise

In Sydney's east, this lush pocket of peacefulness heightens the sophistication of a contemporary home

WORDS TAMMY HUYNH PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



LEFT The sculptural stems of a *Zamia furfuracea* plant are the perfect addition to this moody front entrance. Wood-fired pot, Garden Life.

OPPOSITE A shallow bowl raises the profile of *Agave* 'Blue Glow', giving it a greater sense of prominence in the bed. The silvery blue-grey tones in the agave, olive and *Leucophyta brownii* were picked up from the materiality of the home, creating a harmonious balance between architecture and landscape.

Once the knockdown and rebuild of this home in Sydney's east was complete, the owners, Paul and Lyn Say, were keen to start on their bare and uninviting front courtyard. They wanted a garden with street appeal that complemented the new home's modern architecture. "My husband was convinced I could do the job, but I knew better," says Lyn. "Although I love gardening, coming up with a design was beyond me." After seeing his work in a previous issue of *Inside Out*, Lyn enlisted the help of landscape designer Adam Robinson to reimagine the 50-square-metre space and settle the new house into its surroundings.

In her brief, Lyn requested a tough but dynamic planting palette and "something to soften the big white wall". While she loves pottering and maintaining a garden, she wanted the plants to be fairly low maintenance, allowing the couple to travel without fretting about the garden. Apart from that, the design direction was mostly left to Adam, who set about creating a space with maximum impact within the limitations of the 10.7 x 4.7-metre north-west-facing area.

Due to its proximity to the beach, the site is made up of sandy soil and is exposed to harsh coastal winds. Adam thought a palette of highly textured plants would suit the tough conditions and work with the materiality of the house. "The

plants soften the front and ground the robust architecture while creating a striking display," he explains. Key plantings include a loose olive hedge, a white bird of paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*), and silver-blue-hued agaves. But the cloud-pruned junipers, underplanted with a sea of foxtail ferns, are the hero of the design. "They're sculptural, theatrical, and create a playful feel," says Adam. Lyn also loves them. "They are a real feature of the front garden – like a living painting!" she adds.

Though the planting is not overly complex, it was important to create textural contrast. As such, bold, sculptural agaves and giant bromeliads are juxtaposed with the finer, softer forms of *Carex comans* 'Frosted Curls', lomandra, walking iris (*Neomarica gracilis*) and cushion bush (*Leucophyta brownii*). Employing different shades of green plays on tonality and maintains visual interest while providing the perfect backdrop for punctuations of burgundy and silver.

The relaxed nature of the plant palette is echoed in the crazy paving at the front entrance, which extends into the garden as casual stepping stones. "The crazy pave is ideal because even though it's a hard material, by nature it's softer and more organic," says Adam. Around the stepping stones, *Dichondra repens* hugs the ground, densely covering the areas between the steppers. "Having plantings running through it allows the stepping-stone path to read like part of the garden rather than



"A landscape designer pulls from the architecture, taking cues from the materiality and colour palette to connect the home and the landscape and create a naturally beautiful and cohesive design"

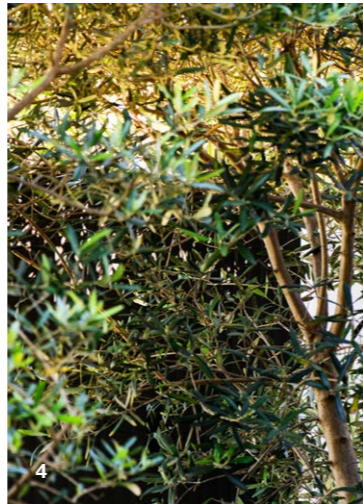
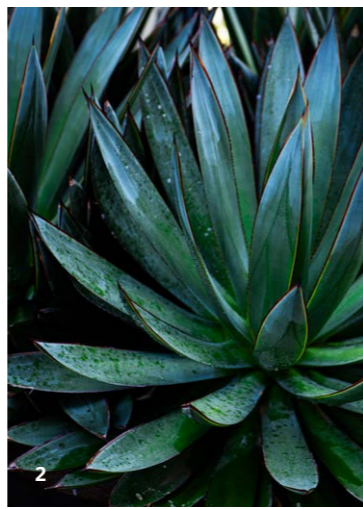
ADAM ROBINSON, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

just a path running through the garden,” says Adam. “The stepping stones provide access to the side, and it was a playful way to make a practical path interesting.”

To blur the boundaries and give the planting greater dimension, Adam stained the timber fence black Japan. “When there are plants along a fence, it’s best to stain it a dark colour – that helps bring the planting to the foreground and makes the background recede,” says Adam. “The plant colours are intensified as a result.” To this end, white birds of paradise were selected for a corner of the back section to elevate the garden and impart a coastal feel. These plantings – together with the crazy paver steppers – are repeated along the side perimeter, allowing the garden to feel like a connected, cohesive design.

By the front door, a large cardboard plant (*Zamia furfuracea*) stands sentinel, creating a sense of arrival. Chosen for its intriguing growth habit and low maintenance, its verdant foliage pops against the darker tones of the door. Anchoring the display is a pair of giant bromeliads (*Alcantarea imperialis*), underplanted with *Dracaena trifasciata* ‘Moonshine’ and *Dichondra repens*. What was once a thoroughfare to the front door is now a space that invites you to linger.

Lyn and Paul are thrilled with the way the garden has turned out. Adam’s choice of planting surprises and delights everyone who sees it. While being a garden to admire, Lyn says the easy-care plot is also great for gardening: “I love pottering around – pulling out the odd weed, clipping and shaping.”¹⁰ See more at adamrobinsondesign.com or [@adamrobinsondesign](https://www.instagram.com/adamrobinsondesign)



plant palette

A selection of hardy foliage plants with bold shapes, colours and textures are judiciously positioned to ensure interest at all levels

1 Foxtail fern (*Asparagus meyeri*) looks out of this world and offers a striking contrast against more structural plantings.

2 Agave ‘Blue Glow’ is perfect for punctuating beds of soft foliage.

3 Felt bush (*Kalanchoe beharensis*), an arborescent succulent, is ideal for colour and contrast.

4 Olive (*Olea europaea*) is a versatile tree that can be pruned into a loose privacy hedge.

5 Giant bromeliad (*Alcantarea imperialis*) scales things up with its large crown of leaves.

6 *Dracaena trifasciata* ‘Moonshine’ is a drought-tolerant succulent that’s tolerant of low light.



Laid in stepping-stone formation, the crazy paving invites exploration as it disappears around the corner. Groundcover *Dichondra repens* fills the spaces in between. **OPPOSITE** A verdant planting scheme of alocasia, walking iris and white bird of paradise transforms this side access into a cool oasis, making the shaded thoroughfare a more pleasurable experience.