

This page The impressive sandstone facade of The Abbey in Annandale, Sydney, framed by a lush garden designed by William Dangar.

SPECIAL REQUEST

A garden full of flowers was on the wish list for the owners of this historic property in Sydney, and *William Dangar* delivered a bouquet of fragrant blooms and more.

Photographs: PRUE RUSCOE. Words: GEORGINA REID



This property in the inner west suburb of Annandale is one of the premier examples of gothic revival architecture in Sydney. Built in 1882 by John Young in a failed attempt to encourage his wife to move from England to Australia, The Abbey was used as a boarding house in the late 1800s, divided into flats in the 1920s, and returned to private ownership in the late 1950s. When the current owners bought it in 2009, it was nearly derelict.

The new owners' priority was to restore the building to its former glory – a long and involved process, given the scale and nature of the property. The garden was also high on the list. Enter landscape designer William Dangar, who had worked with the owners on two previous homes. “When the clients moved in, they pressed the go button on the garden design as they needed some respite from the mess of the rest of the property,” he says.

The site is huge, comprising the residence, large stables at the rear, a sunken grotto/orchid house at the entry, vegetable gardens and a newly built pool and lawn area to the north. To provide a framework and direction for the design, William and his team created a site masterplan, which they deconstructed into smaller projects, starting with the most pressing issue – privacy and retreat amid the chaos of the renovation.

William's solution to the clients' privacy concerns meant some serious structural changes to the garden. On the property's southern side sits a tall block of apartments, previously screened by very old liquidambar trees, which were in decline and needed to be removed. William replaced them with advanced natives like tuckeroo (*Capaniopsis*

anacardioides), macadamia (*Macadamia integrifolia*), and Illawarra flame tree (*Brachycton acerifolius*). Dense layers of screen planting between the trees provide a strong sense of seclusion and retreat.

A series of sandstone walls using salvaged stone from the site were created. “Instead of one solid wall I designed a series of offset sandstone blocks,” says William. “The beauty of these is that they allow the plants to trickle out between the walls giving a soft, staggered effect.”

Moving through the terraces on the southern side of the house, the garden opens up, with the planting changing from leafy tropical to soft Mediterranean – a mixture of hardy flowering plants and succulents such as mother-in-law's tongue (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) and aloe. One of the client's desires for the front garden was plenty of fragrant flowers. “The clients love flowers, and I'm not a very floral designer,” William says. “It was fun working with them to select species that were both highly perfumed and good flowerers.”

This is a very special garden. What William has done, guided by his clients, is interpreted the architecture and historic value of the property to create a garden that is sympathetic, exciting and warm. It doesn't feel new or of a particular era, it just feels like it belongs. “We wanted to keep the imperfection in the landscape,” William says. “The clients weren't interested in restoring the house to museum quality. They wanted it to have a lived-in kind of feel. The garden echoes this.” It's a rich, beautiful and engaging space, befitting the magnificence of the residence and its history.

For more go to williamdangar.com.au; or theplantbunter.com.au.

This page The owner loves flowers and fragrant plants, so William responded with mass plantings of gardenia (*Gardenia augusta 'Florida'*) framing the front entry stairs, noisette rose (*Rosa 'Crepuscle'*) growing over the original metal arbours, and gazania (*Gazania tomentosa*) as a bright flowering ground cover. Opposite page The garden is productive as well as beautiful, containing an extensive vegetable patch.





This page Angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia* cvs.) frames the entry stairs. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Sandstone stepping stones wind around the southern side of the residence. A tall Bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*) provides a sense of scale against the facade! An informal sitting area in the east-facing front garden is perfect for a morning coffee. The abundance of the garden helps to soften the bulk of the building.

