



GROWTH INDUSTRY

Rusting steel cylinders and glossy tropical plantings add a sleek contemporary fringe to a heritage property in Sydney.

Photographs PRUE RUSCOE Words GEORGINA REID

This page Layers of dense planting create a sense of separation between the pool area and courtyard. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Potted snow pears form the focal point of the gravel courtyard at the rear of the home. William worked with the existing plants, such as this large *Magnolia grandiflora*, to create a soft, inviting poolside garden. Tropical plants such as Japanese aralia (*Fatsia japonica*) and kentia palms (*Hawea fosteriana*) were used to soften and complement the bulk of the residence.



Landscape designer William Dangar is no stranger to designing gardens to complement historic Sydney homes. What is interesting about his approach is that while the outcomes of his designs are always sympathetic to the architecture, the gardens themselves are not easily identified as being from any particular era. They have an air of elegance and timelessness about them.

This garden at the rear of a Victorian gothic property in Balmain is a great example of William's light touch. The home is part of a convent built in 1876 that was converted into separate residences many years ago. Split over three levels, the living areas of the home are at the top, looking out over the garden and towards the city skyline. For this reason, the clients were keen that the garden looked great, not only from within but also from above. William used strong geometry and clear lines to provide a sense of cohesion and structure from all angles.

The garden itself consists of two separate rooms. Connecting to the rear verandah of the house is a circular gravel terrace flanked by a low box hedge (*Buxus microphylla*). Linking the garden very much to the present is a series of three large rusted-steel cylinders planted with snow pears (*Pyrus nivalis*). They were not only raised for aesthetic reasons, as William explains. "There was quite a lot of rock on the site, so we put the snow pears in Cor-ten steel rings to get them out of the ground. This also works to prohibit root development, which slows their growth, keeping them nice and compact."



This page from top A pair of maple trees flank the front entry to the home. A cluster of fiddle-leaf figs planted in old terracotta pots frame the verandah leading out to the rear garden.



The circular gravel area is surrounded by leafy tropical planting, screening both the pool fence and pool itself from the house. Tiger grass (*Thysanolaena maxima*), rhapsis palms (*Rhapis excelsa*) and fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*) were combined in a style William calls “Sydney tropical”, referencing the architecture of the house but also softening it with rich, textural planting.

The gravel terrace and its dense planting opens up to a pool area, which was existing when William was commissioned to design the garden. Seeing no reason to change it, he and his team worked with the surrounding paving, pool and trees, and simply filled out the area with carefully selected plants such as seaside daisy (*Gazania spp.*), lomandra (*Lomandra tanika*) and tiger grass. Again, he expertly connects the historic with the modern through his planting design of masses of structural and textural plants.

Working with a site rather than trying to force preconceived ideas onto it is something that has become increasingly important to William over his 20-year career. “Working within the existing fabric of a property means there is an immediate connection to the site. I want my gardens to feel like they’ve been there forever, that they fit with their surroundings,” he says.

William has succeeded in his quest with this garden and it seems he is pretty happy with it too. “I like this garden,” the landscape designer explains. “It suits the house: it’s got structure but it doesn’t look super-stylised, like it’s just been wheeled out by a designer. It looks at home.”

For more go to williamdangar.com.au. Georgina Reid’s website is theplantbunter.com.au.