

# on top of the world

Spectacular views, room to move and a designer's eye combine to turn this rooftop terrace from a concrete wilderness into an elegant and relaxing entertaining area

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The custom-built New Guinea rosewood lounge has a low profile, maximising comfort positioned below the wind. A square dining table and 'Romy' chairs, both from Robert Plumb, sit behind the dividing wall, forming the ultimate rooftop entertainer's zone. The cushions are upholstered in a combination of Zimmer + Rohde 'Caribbean Check' and Zepel Fabrics 'Interior' in Zebra fabrics.



**W**hen landscape designer William Dangar began chatting to a professional couple in the Sydney showroom of his outdoor furniture and exterior design company, Robert Plumb, he didn't imagine it would lead to a full-scale revamp of their

penthouse terrace. The pair had come in looking for heavy outdoor furniture, as they needed something that wouldn't blow away.

Situated in The Rocks area of downtown Sydney, the top-floor apartment boasts spectacular views over Barangaroo and the southern side of the city. It was let down by the outdoor area, a huge wind-blown expanse with no personality that only housed an oversized stainless-steel barbecue, a planter of star jasmine and a load of fake plants left behind after the marketing campaign.

What William saw was an amazing space woefully under-utilised and he was hired to turn this barren expanse into an entertaining space and private retreat from the city below. "The brief was to come up with a design that would make the most of the setting and be a great entertaining space to host dinner for eight or a group for cocktails," says William. "But it also needed to be a comfortable space to just relax. It's a big area so the first thing to do was to break it up into separate zones."

Enter builder Bill Clifton, William's builder-partner at Robert Plumb. "All the elements of this garden were designed around the fact that they had to be put into the lift to get them up here," says Bill. "We wanted to do that with minimum disruption to the other residents so we designed and built the furniture in the workshop, then took it apart and reassembled it on site. The lounge came in 12 parts. Most of the work was done behind the scenes."

The flooring was also brought up in the lift as long strips of New Guinea rosewood. "The original floor was a great expanse of concrete pavers," says William. "They sit on polypads, which are specially designed supports for the paving slabs. It's a common technique in high rises as it reduces the weight and, if drainage is an issue, it means you can easily get under them. I fabricated some matching squares made from timber and replaced about a third of the concrete pavers. It looks beautiful – the wood tiles break up the concrete and soften the look. The style we were after was subdued and sophisticated and, in time, the timber will weather to the same colour as the pavers."



Surrounding the rooftop were the existing boundary walls and linear planters, which William planted with low red yucca (*Hesperaloe parviflora*), also known as hummingbird yucca. "The idea was to have the boundaries take a back seat so as not to interfere with the view," says Bill. "The walls are actually about a metre high but, because of the soft planting and pale colour, they seem much lower."

When it came to the rest of the planting, the choice was limited by the conditions and a complementary desire for low maintenance. "Rooftops are hardcore," says William. "They're so exposed. You need plants that can take whatever's thrown at them. For this reason we used mainly succulents: Aloe 'Southern Cross', agave *Victoriae-Reginae*, blue chalk sticks [*Senecio Serpens*] and crassula ovata 'Gollum', among others. The Japanese box [*Buxus microphylla japonica*] hedging that surrounds the seating area and the herbs by the barbecue – rosemary, oregano and curry plant [*Helichrysum italicum*] – are the only things that need watering, so it's low maintenance. When the buxus grows in, it will be a great windbreak."

The project took eight months in total, but most of that was the design and planning – the actual build took about one month. "It was extremely well planned and organised as far as different trades were concerned," says Bill. "We had to schedule in the electrics, plumbing and irrigation but it went like clockwork. The build phase was probably only about 10 days on site before landscaping started."

"We had to be in and out quickly and mindful of the neighbours," says William. "Once the build started, the process was flawless. Everything went smoothly: the owners couldn't be happier." **10** For more of William's landscaping projects, visit [williamdangar.com.au](http://williamdangar.com.au), and find more outdoor products at [robertplumb.com.au](http://robertplumb.com.au).



The long lounge (left) is big enough to cater for guests and doubles as a comfy spot to stretch out for a nap. Hardy succulents, all in planters from Robert Plumb (above & below), bring long-lasting greenery to the rooftop while the built-in Electrolux barbecue brings the kitchen outside. The restrained colour palette highlights the New Guinea rosewood (above & below), while keeping the terrace low-maintenance.

#### 4 key plant picks Here are William's top choices in this no-fuss rooftop garden



**Senecio serpens** (blue chalk sticks) works well as edging and groundcover.



**Agave Victoriae-Reginae** (Queen Victoria agave) is a beautiful yet tough little succulent.



**Crassula ovata 'Gollum'** adds interesting structure with tubular leaves.



**Aptenia cordifolia** (heartleaf ice plant) is a creeper with glossy leaves and pink flowers.

PHOTOGRAPHY: (SENECIO SERPENS & CRASSULA OVATA) SAM MCADAM-COOPER, (AGAVE VICTORIAE-REGINAE) PENNY CLAY



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WILLIAM DANGAR, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

The timber planters throughout were custom-designed by William Dangar to complement the rest of the furniture. A pair of Robert Plumb “Seti” armchairs sit alongside a “Chunky” coffee table to create a relaxed setting that can withstand the elements.