



FRONT
and centre

The view is everything in William Dangar's sensitive garden

Photographs PRUE RUSCOE Words KAREN McCARTNEY



These pages, from left A Japanese courtyard of white Cowra pebbles planted with a gleditsia beside the linear water feature. Underpruning of the fig retains the canopy without impeding the view.

design for this Sydney waterfront property.



With about a third of Will Dangar's work concentrated on the edge of Sydney Harbour, it's natural for him to think he's seen every perfect view. Occasionally, though, he is taken by surprise, as in the case of a new house at Kirribilli. "It's facing south, down a tight cul-de-sac, so nothing had quite prepared me for this unreal view out to Bradley's Head, Taronga Zoo and the eastern suburbs beyond." But a view can be a double-edged sword, he says, with careful management needed when it comes to the placement and maintenance of trees.

For this project, he worked with longstanding collaborators PopovBass, an architectural practice well known for its emphasis on materiality. "You use a simplicity of materials, you are proud of the natural materials, such as brick, concrete and timber, and then emphasise the quality of the materials by the way light hits them," says Alex Popov.

The steel-framed house, with its structured Mondrian-style facade, has an architectural precision that is complemented by the landscaping. Right from first view, there is a sense of how planting and form interact, with the use of large-leafed ivy to soften a retaining wall and a crepe myrtle tree in a structural planter that forms part of the architecture of the entrance.

This is the start of a planned journey through the house interspersed with moments of visual reward – a sculpture, an aerial view of the pool from a bridge walkway, the canopy of a gleditsia – which all contribute to a sequenced experience that culminates in the expansive view.

At the pool, which lies on the entry side of the house, strong visual contrast is created between the largely white man-made structure and the dense, lush foliage of rhaps and large-leafed ivy. "It creates some drama in a simple space and I like the placement, by interior designer Thomas Hamel, of the sinuous 'E-Turn' bench by Brodie Neill," says Will. "It acts almost as a sculpture."

The horizontal surfaces in the garden reflect some of the regimentation of the architecture – a plane of grass, a Japanese courtyard of white Cowra pebbles, the rectangular pool of aqua water, the stone surface of the patio – but this is offset by a number of expressive elements. The intersection of the patio and lawn is softened by a generous fringing of mondo grass that both adds texture and bridges the two spaces. Kentia palms, with their whisper of leaves when in motion, line the border of the property and frame the linear water feature with its constant motion of water and sound. Gleditsia, with its soft lime green leaves, has been carefully positioned and pruned so as not to compromise the view from either the top or ground level of the house. "We also worked with arborists on the existing Port Jackson fig, which is positioned at the harbour's edge," says Will. "We created a beautiful sculptural form by getting rid of all the epicormic growth on the trunk and celebrating the natural sweep of the tree through which to view the harbour."

This is an edited extract from Garden by William Dangar (Murdoch Books, RRP\$69.99). Signed copies are available to pre-order now at robertplumb.com.au.



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This page, clockwise from top left: A mass planting of rhaps palms, along with the green wall of ivy, form a lush setting for the pool and outdoor area. The ivy-clad wall and built-in planter box, featuring a crepe myrtle surrounded by giant mondo grass, create a sense of arrival. Kentia palms line the border of the property. (Opposite page) The natural sweep of the fig was celebrated.