

SET IN STONE



Boston ivy climbs the black wall behind a tall Japanese maple and silver *Euphorbia wulfenii* (this page). The aluminium gate (opposite) was treated with Porter's Paints 'Liquid Iron' and 'Instant Rust' finishes for an aged effect.



A landscape designer made the most of the industrial and heritage features of this inner-city garden to create an urban oasis

WORDS NIGEL BARTLETT PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS WARNES

When you have a small outdoor space, you might feel like your choices are limited: no more than one seating area, a need to keep things plain and simple, and don't try to fit too much in. This courtyard proves that none of those ideas are true. Located behind a two-storey house in Sydney's Surry Hills, this garden has two distinct areas, is rich in colour and texture, and packed with interest.

The courtyard is the work of landscape designer Oliver Sizeland and his team at Growing Rooms. They were hired to transform what was once a dingy space whose hallmarks were its cream pavers, bland beige walls and surprisingly large trees that served only to create a cluttered, cramped feeling.

The owner wanted a courtyard that was both contemporary and organic in look. Out went the trees and the pavers, and the beige walls had to go, too. The new space combines industrial and natural elements, nodding to the old factory to one side while also fulfilling the owner's desire for a variety of textures and finishes. Part of the courtyard is covered in polished concrete. The rest is paved with elongated cobblestone strips, which contrast with the smoothness of the concrete and complement the original sandstone factory wall.

Equally, the narrow cobblestones tie in with wooden bench seating and cupboards around two sides of the courtyard. "Because the stones are long strips, you get a linear effect that ties in really well with the timber," says Oliver.

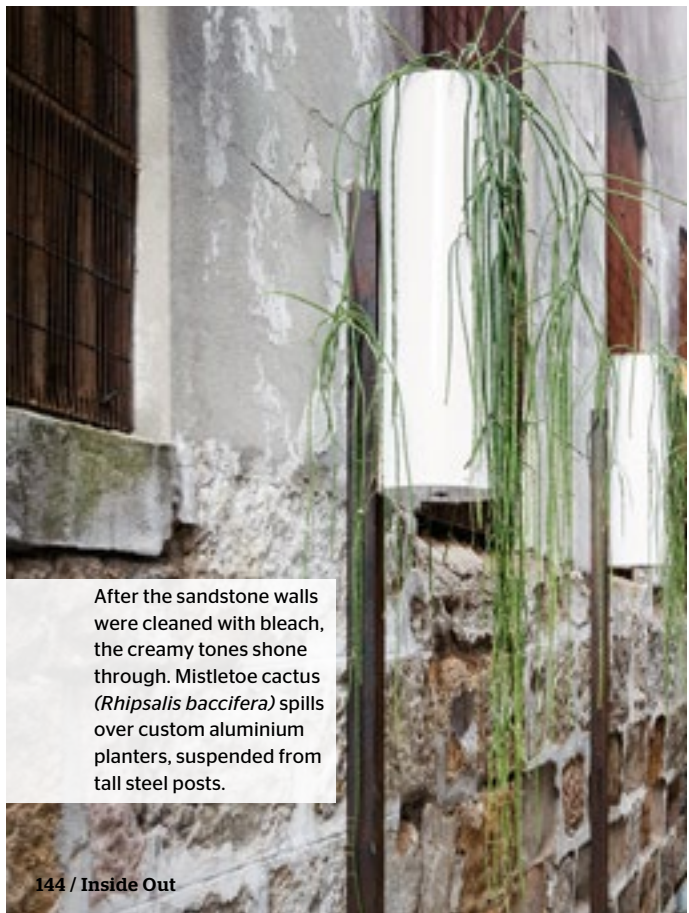
He chose spotted gum for the wood because of the warmth it brings to the courtyard. "It's such a beautiful timber, with great variations in the shades – everything from reds all the way through to ambers and greys," says Oliver. "They give it a lovely depth – you just gravitate to that bench."



Madagascar jasmine (*Stephanotis floribunda*) climbs the wall behind the Bunnings dining table. The Coco Republic chairs and coffee table give the space a relaxed feel, set up with a Tait tray and IKEA jug and glasses.



The waterproof storage cupboard, clad in spotted gum, houses the hot water unit and holds cushions when not in use. "Each of the benches has storage, too," says Oliver. "The hinged lids all lift up."



After the sandstone walls were cleaned with bleach, the creamy tones shone through. Mistletoe cactus (*Rhipsalis baccifera*) spills over custom aluminium planters, suspended from tall steel posts.



“WE GAVE IT A LIGHT GRIND TO EXPOSE SOME OF THE AGGREGATE”
OLIVER SIZELAND, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

GRILL - KOMODO KAWADO, KOMODOKAWADO.COM

Black-framed steel bi-fold doors replaced traditional French-style doors to create a breezy, open feel at the back of the house. "We wanted maximum glass, minimum frame," says Oliver.



PAINT MATCH

The rich textured walls surrounding this garden are painted in Porter's Paints 'Stone Paint Coarse' in Aniseed. The dark tone highlights the organic timber and greenery.



ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NATALIE JOHNSON. PAINT COLOUR MAY VARY ON APPLICATION.

Oliver decided he also needed to soften the five-metre-tall walls around the courtyard, so he used bleach to clean up the sandstone wall and installed uplights to show it off at night. "Bleach is very gentle and brings up the stone amazingly," he says. "It really brings the whiteness back."

His solution for the other two forbiddingly high walls might sound surprising: he painted them black. There was method in his madness though. The dramatic colour formed the perfect backdrop to set off the plantscape he introduced. "Black makes the foliage and all the greens from the plants pop," says Oliver. "It also ties in with the dark floorboards inside, so there's now a link between indoors and outdoors."

Oliver's main goal in his choice of plantings was to introduce colour to what could otherwise be a stark space. "My number-one choice is the 'Acer' Japanese maple tree because its leaves turn a beautiful orangey-red in autumn. It's stunning against the black wall," says Oliver.

"We also planted Boston ivy to grow up the rear wall," he says. "Letting a climber run up the wall makes it feel softer and, again, the colours really stand out."

In addition, Oliver chose plenty of succulents "for their year-round colour and because they're so easy to look after". The succulents fill custom aluminium planters built in behind the bench seats and a garden bed on one side. This bed juts out and extends into the concrete in a strip that looks like a plant catwalk.

"It's designed to separate the courtyard into two zones," says Oliver. "This creates a kind of barrier between the two areas. The benches are designed for casual lounging, while the table and chairs are a more formal area where you'd sit down for dinner."

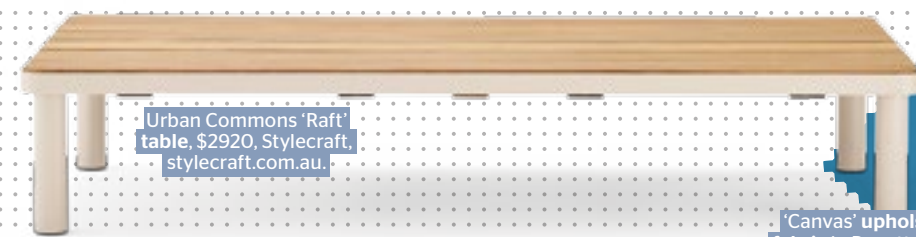
The strip also adds visual interest, which Oliver believes is vital when designing small garden spaces. "You need to jam as much interest in as you can," he says. "It's hard to create two zones in such a small space, but that's the key to the success of this one." **10**
Find out more about *Growing Rooms* at growingrooms.com.au.



Lightly ground polished concrete meets Eco Outdoor 'Filetti' pavers in Endicott for a textural effect. Blue chalk sticks (*Senecio serpens*) and Mexican lily fill the bed between the two surfaces.

GET THE LOOK

Re-create this inner-city haven with a clever combo of natural tones and long-wearing outdoor textiles. Timber adds a hint of warmth, while stone pavers echo heritage features.



Urban Commons 'Raft' table, \$2920, Stylecraft, stylecraft.com.au.

'Canvas' upholstery fabric in Regatta, POA, Sunbrella, sunbrella.com.



'4 Seasons' low sheen exterior paint in Metal Links, \$57.50/4L, British Paints, britishpaints.com.au.

'Filetti' pavers in Endicott, \$144/sqm, Eco Outdoor, ecooutdoor.com.au.