

curve appeal

This impressive garden makeover cleverly links the terrace and pool area with an inviting entertaining zone

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FIRE PIT Stairs clad in stone from Australian Sandstone Merchants connect to the top garden. "Crazy paving works well in curved areas," says landscape architect Oliver Sizeland. "Instead of using shards underfoot, we shaped the sandstone into circular pieces to give a softer feel." An ashlar pattern features on the wall, while Screenwood cladding in western red cedar continues the curve.



When you're renovating, it's easy to ignore or underplay the garden, but it makes such a difference to the feel of the house," says Samantha Masnick of this modern oasis in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

The garden is now a highlight for the Masnick family, made up of Samantha, Simon and their four children – aged from 11 to 17 – and they relish spending time outdoors. The couple love entertaining friends and extended family while the kids splash in the pool and roast marshmallows in the fire pit.

Samantha and Simon were renovating their house with the help of architect Luigi Rosselli and wanted a better link between the terrace/pool level and the lower garden level to enhance the garden's useability and improve accessibility. They engaged Oliver Sizeland of Growing Rooms to rework the lower garden and the link between the two spaces. "We came up with a curved fire pit area with a bench, sweeping stairs and tiered planter beds to convert dead space and an old lawn into another garden room," says Oliver.

"We wanted a durable, low-maintenance garden with spaces where we could relax with friends," says Samantha. "The garden design is perfectly suited to each different area. The front provides an inviting entrance and the rear garden offers privacy and a backdrop to the pool, while the fire pit and sitting area provide extra entertaining space."

STEPS An imposing *Dracaena draco* (Dragon's Blood tree) stands sentry at the foot of the curved staircase. A *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* (Grass tree) at the rear helps frame a waterfall of *Senecio mandraliscae* (Blue chalk sticks) and *Myoporum parvifolium*, while several *Agave attenuata* provide textural contrast. **DETAIL** Blue chalk sticks, crassula and aloe feature on the pool terrace border. **POOL AREA (opposite)** The wall, painted in dark Dulux Domino, recedes behind the abundant greenery. Cushions and pool equipment are housed under the spotted gum day bed. Pietra Di Loiano porcelain tiles in Settefonti from Rocks On surround the pool.



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SAMANTHA MASNICK, HOMEOWNER



FRONT GARDEN The front area also received a makeover with large-leafed shade-loving plants such as *Spathiphyllum* 'Sensation', *Aspidistra elatior*, *Philodendron* 'Rojo Congo' and *Acanthus mollis*. *Viola hederacea* makes for a colourful groundcover. The 'Sango Kaku' feature maple tree presides over the top. **FIRE PIT (opposite)** The Robert Plumb 'Angelina' fire pit is the main event in the lower garden. A spotted gum bench continues the dramatic curves.



“We used three different styles of sandstone in the fire pit area to get subtle variations”

OLIVER SIZELAND, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER



SIDE PATH (left) Groundcover of *Viola hederacea* and *Aspidistra elatior* surrounds a weathered stepping-stone path by the side of the house. **OUTDOOR KITCHEN (below)** A fabulous entertaining area with a built-in barbecue and spotted gum cabinetry includes everything you could need when cooking up a feast. **POOLSIDE (right)** A Domo dining setting and pair of Eco Outdoor sofas look out over the pool, which is framed by a tall hedge of *Bambusa textilis* var. *gracilis* (Slender Weavers bamboo).



RODA 'BRICK' DINING TABLE 'HARP' CHAIRS & 'TEKA' COFFEE TABLE, DOMO, DOMOCOMAU, 'MALUKA' SOFA, ECO OUTDOOR, ECOOUTDOOR.COM.AU



A curved sandstone stairway connects the pool terrace at house level, which is the main entertaining area, to the lower garden. The inner curve of the staircase defines the fire-pit enclosure – an additional relaxation spot and feature of the lower garden, with a cantilevered floating bench in spotted gum that wraps around the space. Stepped retaining terraces flank the outer side of the stairs and are filled with textural planting combinations where foliage reigns supreme. Fine-leaf groundcover *Myoporum parvifolium* spills over the wall, softening hard stone edges, while *Agave attenuata*, *Phormium* ‘Bronze Warrior’, *Senecio mandraliscae* and *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* create contrast with their striking shapes and colours. The dark bronze of the *Phormium* contrasts with the bright greens and silver-greys in front, which together provide a lively, fresh look alongside the sandstone, also linking with the silver tones of the tiles.

Screening along the perimeter, and joining this garden with the pool area, is the vigorous Slender Weavers bamboo that

replaced the old conifer hedge. Two stunning *Dracaena draco* (Dragon’s Blood trees) standing boldly upright are justifiably the family’s favourites. “Viewed from the upper levels and uplit at night, they are a spectacular sight,” says Oliver. *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* (Grass tree) adds further foliage and provides contrast. The painted stainless-steel balustrade of the deck and pool, designed by architect Luigi Rosselli, continues down the stairs, providing a visual link between upper and lower levels. On the terrace, the planting colours and textures are repeated in smaller succulents together with aloe, which flourish in the hot sun and reflected heat from the paving.

The front garden also had a makeover, continuing the use of foliage plants to create impact. They form a tapestry of tropical textures, teamed with warm sandstone colours. Much shadier than the rear garden, the dramatic effect here is created with large-leaved shade-lovers. Groupings of *Spathiphyllum* ‘Sensation’, *Acanthus mollis*, *Aspidistra elatior* and *Philodendron* ‘Rojo Congo’

result in a bold effect. A carpet of *Viola hederacea* and *Dichondra repens* surrounds the stone-stepper pathway, adding to the lush green appearance. “When looking out from the study desk, there’s a lovely combination of plants that integrates well with the sandstone retaining wall to create a peaceful outlook,” says Samantha. A mini jungle forms a living barrier between the steppers and carport, where the lacelike fronds of *Cyathea australis* float among the huge purple leaves of *Colocasia esculenta* ‘Black Magic’ and dark-green *Rhaphis excelsa*. By the driveway, two beautiful Japanese maples preside over the space, with a third added near the entrance stairs – an exquisite *Acer palmatum* ‘Sango Kaku’ feature tree.

The Masnicks are delighted with their new garden. “We entertain often and our revamped garden works so well when we have friends over,” says Samantha. “For a family like ours who spends a lot of time outside, the garden is a highlight and helps make our house a home.”

See more of Oliver’s work at growingrooms.com.au.

FEATURE TREES

+ *Dracaena draco* (Dragon’s Blood tree) Ideal for a sunny position, it has a bold shape. Grey-green strappy foliage sits atop a strong trunk, creating impact for a contemporary look. “The *Dracaena draco* trees were always going to be star of the show,” says Oliver. “Their amazing sculptural form makes such a statement.”

+ *Acer palmatum* ‘Sango Kaku’ (Coral Bark Maple) This is an excellent small tree for a shady, protected position. Deciduous, with lovely leaf colour in autumn, young branches are coral pink to red in winter. “It’s sensational as you walk out of the front door or come down the stairs,” says Oliver. **10**