

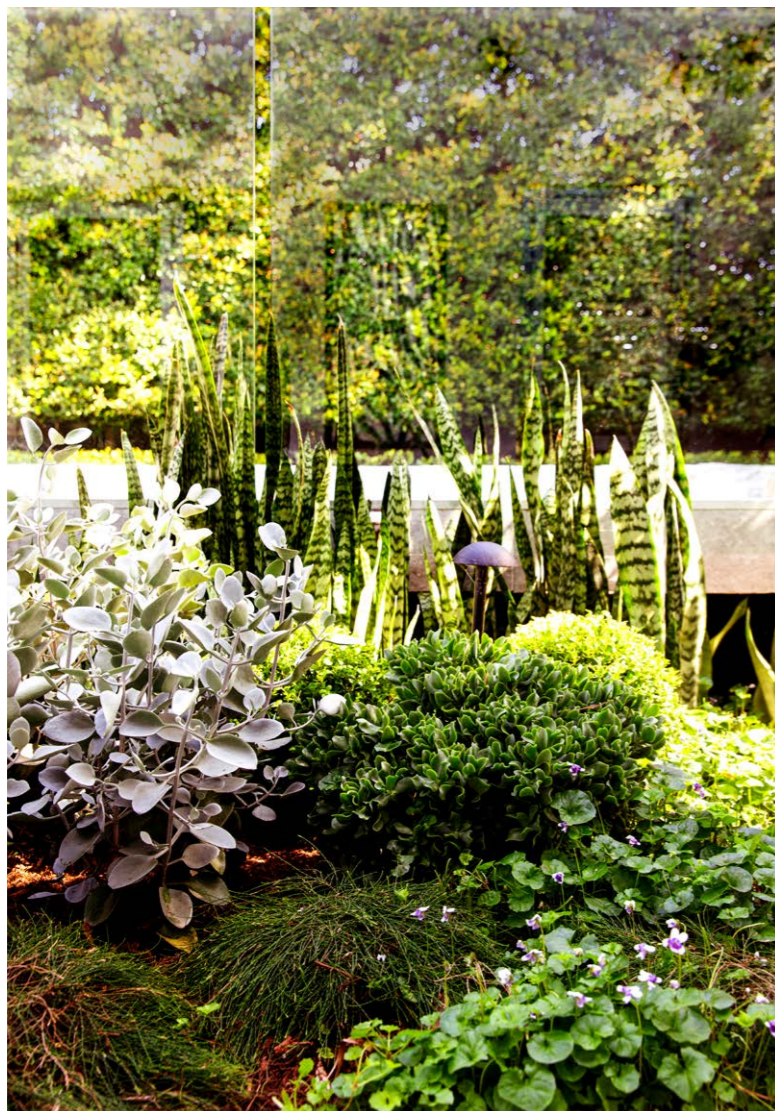
LAPS OF LUXURY

A generous pool need not swamp your backyard with oceans of concrete, as this shimmering swimmers' sanctuary in Sydney's east reveals

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Can-do cantilevers are a recurring theme in this garden — in the pool coping, the concrete steps and the pergola, where they have been used to striking effect. Stacked stone wall in split-face granite from Epic Stone. Arrowmill porcelain pool pavers from Eco Outdoor. Ezarri White mosaic tiles, supplied by builder Malibu Pools. Powdercoated pergola in Dulux Natural White. Kett 'Calm' lounger and Tribù 'Drops' table, both Cosh Living.



LEFT Contrasts in foliage colour, texture and shape are celebrated to the full. Compact shrubs *Kalanchoe* 'Silver Spoons' and *Crassula* 'Max Cook', together with groundcovers *Casuarina* 'Cousin It' and native violet (*Viola hederecea*) share this garden bed with the spiky snake plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata*), which lends a vertical element.

OPPOSITE An L-shaped bench under a mango tree, the sole survivor from the original garden, provides a shady spot beside the house. The owners planted the hedge in *Syzygium* 'Select Form' lilly pilly for privacy when they moved in. In the foreground sit a bromeliad (*Alcantarea* 'Silver Plum'), *Kalanchoe* 'Silver Spoons' and *Sansevieria trifasciata*. Floating steps in off-form concrete. Bench seat in Australian blackbutt, with cushions from Ikea and Myer.

Poised above beds of lush greenery, this swimming pool in Sydney's eastern suburbs floats tantalisingly within its tranquil setting. In a magical trick of the eye, landscape architect Oliver Sizeland of Growing Rooms has conjured with cantilevers to ensure this swimmers' paradise remains anything but earthbound. And the shimmering result really makes a splash.

In 2010, the owners bought the property for its large backyard, perfect for their three children, now aged 12 to 18. Especially alluring was a well-established mango tree in one corner, while the neighbours' mature eucalypts lent it a calming, if borrowed, backdrop. "They gave lots of shade and attracted so many birds," says the owner. "But the garden's downfall was the neglected space in front, an old-fashioned produce garden with fruit and olive trees, and a herb garden with waist-high weeds, which no one had tended for years."

The couple undertook a modest makeover by removing those scraggly trees, planting lilly pilly hedging on the boundaries and installing new lawn. But a desire for a pool in 2019 prompted this much more ambitious transformation, for which they hired Growing Rooms on the recommendation of a friend.

"It was just a lot of green – green lawn and green hedge – with little variety," says Oliver. But in the brief for the pool and its surrounds, paradoxically perhaps, green would top the

owners' wishlist. "We did not want lots of concrete, allowing it to take over, but instead were after more species of plants, with a beautiful green outlook," says the owner.

Tricky when the backyard would be dominated by a pool long enough for laps and wide enough for the kids to jump into. "The owner is a keen swimmer, so she wanted the pool to be a decent size [it ended up at 8.4m by 3.6m], with a spa pool for the kids and to entertain the adults," says Oliver. To ensure the pool didn't swamp the yard, he melded it with the landscape.

Counterintuitively perhaps, to make the pool look less prominent, he raised his design and cantilevered it on two sides, so it hovers teasingly half a metre above beds below. Further exploring the theme, entry to the pool is via three floating concrete 'landings' delicately poised above the garden. "The cantilever softens the pool and gives the impression it nestles among the plants," says Oliver. "We didn't want the pool to appear to dominate, even though it does in reality. The off-form concrete stairs mimic what the pool is doing, so people look twice."

Behind the pool, he placed a stacked-stone granite wall in warm browns and greys, while grey paving slabs provide subtle contrast. Beyond, the owners' original lilly pilly hedge, retained for screening, soars four metres high, but is pleached and underplanted with arthropodium and aspidistra. At one end of the pool, beside the house, sit a built-in L-shaped bench, dining area and outdoor kitchen to cater for the owners' love of entertaining, all enjoying the shade of the cherished mango tree.



“We used naturally mounding plants and succulents with low water requirements to look amazing all year round. To support local fauna, we included flowering plants for birds, butterflies and bees”

OLIVER SIZELAND, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Oliver included a carefully considered lighting plan to ensure this garden doesn't lose its impact after the sun goes down. Gardens At Night 'Dome' spike path lights from Southern Electrical. Black plant bowl from Wholesales Direct. *Crassula 'Max Cook'*, *Casuarina 'Cousin It'*, *buxus balls (Buxus microphylla japonica)*, sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*) and *sansevieria moonshine* create intriguing foliage contrasts.



OPPOSITE The existing hedge in *Syzygium australe* 'Select Form' lilly pilly, now up to four metres high, was pleached and underplanted. Branch table and Vela armchairs, all from Cosh Living. *Crassula* 'Max Cook', *Casuarina* 'Cousin It', *Buxus microphylla japonica* balls, *Cycas revoluta* and *sansevieria moonshine* occupy the bed beside the pool.

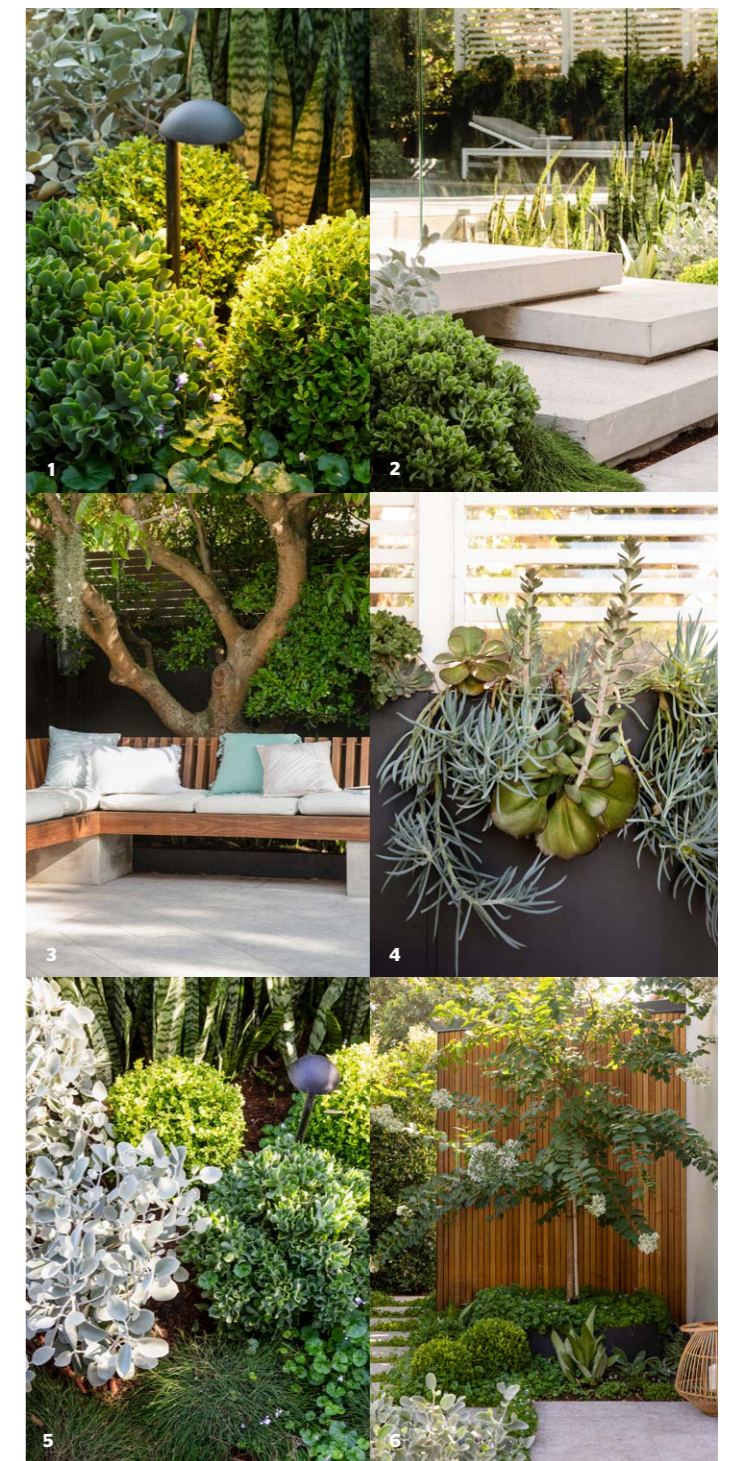
Meanwhile, at the pool's far end, Oliver created a second shaded area offering swimmers respite from the sun that bathes the yard.

With its roof angled elegantly over a sun lounger, a pergola, comprising aluminium battens fixed to three posts set into concrete, extends the cantilever theme that flows throughout. "We pitched it at a slight angle to let in the light and create an open feeling," says Oliver. "The posts go through the planters to give the impression it's tucked into the greenery." Meanwhile, he wrapped the pool in glass fencing to give the illusion of uninterrupted space and preserve the sense of openness.

Combining natives and exotics, the planting palette reflects the sandy loam soils, with soft shades of green and blue/grey creating a tranquil outlook. "We used naturally mounding plants and succulents, with low water requirements to look amazing year round," says Oliver. "To support local fauna, we included flowering plants that are friendly to birds, butterflies and bees." The fuss-free plants include succulents such as *sansevieria* and *Kalanchoe* 'Silver Spoons', cycads and trimmed *buxus* balls, which together create an intriguing interplay of colours, textures and shapes – the rounded *buxus*, for example, in striking contrast to the *sansevieria*'s spiky profiles. "Though the garden bed is not huge at about 1400mm wide, it's layered with plants to give it depth," he says.

While the pool looks spectacular during the day, LED lighting ensures it shines at night, too. And it remains poised in the air after dark, with LED lights running around the middle concrete step, and other lights strategically placed so that it hovers within the greenery.

When she's not swimming laps, the owner soaks up Oliver's handiwork. "I love the way the pool adds a feeling of peace and calm to the garden, especially with the different shades of green and grey around it, and the blue tiles," she says. "It floats like a giant water feature and looks as if it has always been there." **10** The garden just scooped two awards at this year's Landscape Excellence Awards: Best in Residential Construction \$150K To \$350K, and Gold in Residential Design Over 200 sq m. See more Growing Rooms projects at growingrooms.com.au or [@growingrooms](https://www.instagram.com/growingrooms)



design details

Robust plants share this idyllic space with hardscaping that boasts a light touch, thanks to cantilevers and structures in slatted timbers

1 Gardens At Night 'Dome' spike path lights from Southern Electrical ensure the likes of *Crassula* 'Max Cook', *Buxus microphylla japonica* and *Viola hederacea* shine after dark. **2** Concrete formed in-situ was used for the floating polished-concrete landings. **3** The blackbutt bench beside the house boasts a slatted back for lightness. **4** A custom-made aluminium planter below the pergola, in Dulux Ferrodor 810, houses *Senecio serpens* 'Blue

Chalksticks', *Echeveria* sp and *Crassula* 'Max Cook'. **5** A study in fascinating foliage contrasts: *Kalanchoe* 'Silver Spoons', *Crassula* 'Max Cook' and *Casuarina* 'Cousin It'. **6** Between house and pool is a shed for all the pool equipment. Oliver has clad it in Australian blackbutt. Arrowmill pavers from Eco Outdoor. Candle from Myer. Crepe myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* 'Natchez') is underplanted with *buxus* and native violet (*Viola hederacea*).

A slatted bench in Australian blackbutt forms an idyllic hideaway under the old mango tree. "This is the first time we have done a bench with an open back like this," says Oliver. "It ensures the light shines through after dark." An existing lilly pilli hedge has been spruced up to ensure instant privacy. The *Alcantarea* 'Silver Plum' bromeliad echoes the slats of the bench while mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nana') is tucked part way under the cantilever.

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