



# easy glamour

words Monique Balvert-O'Connor  
pictures Chris Parker



## This smart easy-care garden beautifully complements the iconic Art Deco architecture of the house it surrounds.

Tracy Brain's brief was simple and to the point – she wanted a no maintenance garden. When told by her garden designer that 'no maintenance' didn't exist, her response was to "go as low as you can go".

Landscape designer Michelle McDonnell took heed and created a garden which Tracy declares she's totally rapt with. The icing on the cake, she says, is that maintenance equates to half an hour a month.

Tracy, her husband Errol and their three daughters Molly (12), Bella (10) and Scarlett (6) – plus Ruby the dog and Pepper the cat – moved into their 1930s Art Deco house in Tauranga two years ago.

"When we bought it I rang Michelle and said 'we are moving in on such-and-such a

day and you need to be there'. That's how good the garden wasn't. It certainly didn't call my name, and totally let the house down," Tracy says.

The garden was 'stuck in the 1980s', which didn't reflect the era of the house and its iconic architecture. "And there was nowhere to sit," Tracy remembers. Dramatic change was called for. One of the only remaining plants is a majestic michelia tree on the back boundary, while the likes of palm trees, flax, and "lots of overgrown bits" went.

In her endeavours to make this an uncomplicated gardening experience for the Brains, Michelle has opted for mulch to keep weed growth down and a small palette of select plants repeated in different areas.

**Left** The horse-shoe shaped front garden echoes the shape of the Art Deco house.

**Above** A concrete slab underpins a super-sized outdoor table, with a large, black cantilevered umbrella providing the ceiling.

Most of the plants look great all year round, and some – such as the *Viburnum Eve Price* and *Diets grandiflora* (wild iris) – flower for about nine months.

The Brains had a few items on their wish list, such as a welcoming front garden. Accordingly, a weeping silver pear tree is now the front garden centrepiece – so good it was deemed worthy of up-lighting for a touch of night-time magic. The horseshoe shaped garden echoes the form of the house and is edged with *Euonymus* ▶



**Top** The new outdoor fireplace features the classic Art Deco sunburst motif that also features on the front and side of the house.

**Above** Down the side of the house, Robinia Mop Tops are under-planted with hydrangea and clivia.

**Top right** A weeping silver pear tree is the front garden centrepiece and is up-lit for night-time drama.

Resene  
Pulse 

**top  
tip**

Re-colour exterior concrete slabs and pavers with Resene Concrete Stain. See the Resene Decks, Paths, Driveways and Recreational Areas colour chart for ideas.

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japonicus, behind which thrives *Diets grandiflora*, with its little white butterfly-like flowers suspended above the foliage. Corokia Frosted Chocolate hedging at the front has been continued down to the road frontage to create a more impressive entrance and the sense of a bigger garden.

At the back of the house, Tracy and Errol were determined to have an outdoor haven complete with a fireplace and alfresco dining area feeding off the kitchen.

A concrete slab was poured, big enough to cater for their super-sized outdoor table, and a large, black-cantilevered umbrella provides the ceiling. The new outdoor fireplace keeps things toasty and adds to the ambiance. The Art Deco sunburst motif that features on the front and side of the house inspired a similar one to decorate the fireplace.

The Brain's previous home was on a large site where privacy wasn't an issue, but this new inner-city 512m<sup>2</sup> site needed attention given to boundary fences and hedging. Michelle has gone with pleached *Viburnum Eve Price* for instant height on two boundaries.



This “hedge on stilts” is under-planted with star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) as ground cover and *Euonymus japonicus* – which resembles the more common *buxus* – as low hedging.

The garden is on two levels and skilful design has seen the backyard transformed into three outdoor rooms. The biggest contains the outdoor dining area. Beyond the fireplace, to the east, is the spa pool surrounded by an olive tree hedge, star jasmine and gardenia.

Down the side of the house, a third area features *Robinia Mop Tops* under-planted with the trademark large white blooms of *Hydrangea Trophy*. *Clivia* add a splash of orange.

Here Michelle has laid large concrete stepping-stones inter-planted with tiny green mondo. It’s a look she’s repeated on the other side of the house.

Not a single part of this property’s outdoors has escaped the transformation wand – not even the narrow strip down the western side of the house. A plain concrete path butting up against the boundary wall was narrowed allowing for a 400mm-wide strip of garden – wide enough for a row of *Euonymus japonicus* behind which *Ficus pumila* happily creeps up the wall.

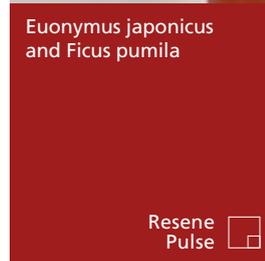
Michelle’s delivered exactly what her clients required in terms of a near-zero maintenance garden and one which suits the era of the house. An inspired Tracy has added another dimension... produce. On the tabletop sit five terracotta pots in which strawberries grow.

“My daughters get to reap the harvest – which equates to about one strawberry a day,” she laughs. **H**



Potted strawberries

Resene Kombi



*Euonymus japonicus* and *Ficus pumila*

Resene Pulse



Fireplace: Landscape Elements

Resene Half Truffle



Cantilevered umbrella: Shade Makers, Mt Maunganui

Designer: Michelle McDonnell Landscape Design

Resene Dell



Get the exterior look with Resene Lumbersider tinted to Resene Half Thorndon Cream.

Resene Half Thorndon Cream

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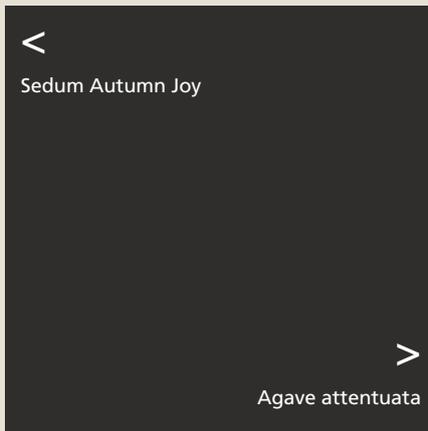
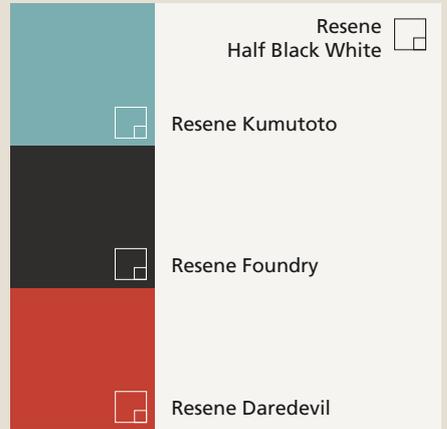
turn the page for two alternative schemes for this Art Deco garden



^ The new design, with its colour scheme of turquoise, red and silver, is inspired by the Art Deco house.

Resene  
Albescent White

illustration Bruce Bryant



**Helen Cloke**  
of Project Landscape suggests  
this alternative design:

Strong, geometric lines and motifs feature in this Art Deco inspired landscape. The space has been designed to produce a feel of casual sophistication, combining elegance with functionality. Plastered columns surround the main outdoor living space while a stainless steel water rill runs alongside, ending in a reflection pond in which sits a 'floating' sculpture. This sculpture provides a focal point from inside the home. Plant species chosen reflect the repetitive geometry and the pastel tones of the Art Deco era. Accents of stainless steel and graphic colours, like Resene Daredevil and Resene Kumutoto, link the individual areas of the landscape and nikau palms and Cape Cod chairs create a resort atmosphere next to the swimming pool.

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△ The Resene Boulder house and Resene English Walnut pergola are a quiet background to the vibrant purple and cerise tones of the plants and cushions.

Resene  
Half Rakaia 

illustration Bruce Bryant



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Aceana Purpurea

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Schist stone

NZ Stone  
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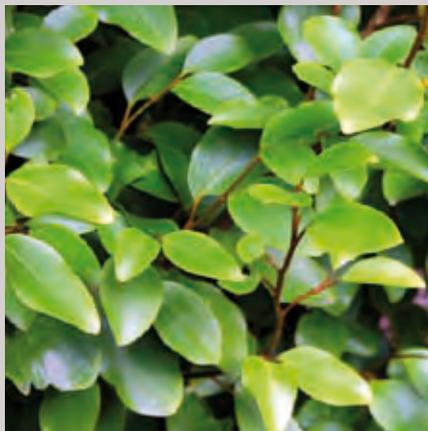
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Castana up/down wall light

Lighting Direct  
www.lightingdirect.co.nz

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Griselinia littoralis



Resene Boulder

Resene English Walnut

Resene Belladonna

Resene Daisy Bush



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Colocasia 'Black Magic'

>

Iris Germanica



Perfect indoor-outdoor flow is created by levelling the outdoor entertainment area with the floor of the house. The pergola, pillars and the stairs create a separate room from the rest of the garden. A block-and-plaster lounge suite with comfortable squabs and cushions makes this a very relaxing place to unwind. A simple palette of colours, plants and materials gives the garden a sense of unity. The coffee table and pillars are made of schist cladding and a special touch is the schist inset strip in the concrete, drawing the eye towards the raised pond and waterfall focal point. The planting is low maintenance with year-round visual appeal, where purples contrast with the green foliage.

Monique Hoogers  
of Imagine Landscape Design  
suggests this alternative design:

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