





born again

A 'dreadful' Christchurch garden is remodeled into a soothing sanctuary.

Having spent several years living in a second-floor central Christchurch apartment, Vance and Cathy Stewart don't take gardens for granted. Now after extensive garden remodeling, they find it incredible to think that last winter, their outside reality involved little more than mud and cold temperatures.

Despite the fact this garden looks fabulously established already, professional landscaper Ross Marriott of Artworks Landscape Ltd is thinking even further ahead. "You have to imagine how this will look in, say, three years," he says. He's as qualified as anyone to say he knows the lie of the land here.

The Stewart house is a gracious homestead characterised by mellow oaty-coloured stucco cladding, and harks back to a gentler era. It once stood as proud mistress of a large corner site – possessing a typical ad-hoc garden of the type baby-boomers recall from childhood, with some grass here, uneven paving there, and eclectic plantings to no particular plan or logic.

Cathy, who now describes the garden as her 'baby', knew when she bought the property two-and-a-half years ago that renovation work would be extensive. But she's no stranger to hard work. She and Vance raised six children in another big old house – one possessing copious outdoor space, before their stint of apartment living near central city schools. For most of that time they escaped to a beautiful house and garden in Akaroa at weekends. ➤



Left A path winds between a huge urn and standard iceberg roses.

Far left An old rhododendron with its twisted trunk was the sole survivor from the original garden.



Above Another urn is the focal point of the outdoor dining area.

Right Wrought iron furniture adds lightness to the area.



Consider elements that have dual uses. For example, in this garden the walls that surround the patio area have been designed to be the perfect height and width to serve as extra seating when numbers swell and all tableside chairs are occupied.

Although it possessed heaps of potential, the Stewarts' current home had languished on the market for an entire year. Not only did it need both external and internal paint, the house's garden was nothing short of "dreadful", Cathy says. She knew she would reincarnate the garden and mentally began with a blank canvas.

Cathy's vision was for a bounty of green structure to provide year-round substance and beauty, as opposed to just "a mass of flowers in summer and mud in winter".

In their initial meetings to nut out an overall concept and plan, Ross and Cathy thoroughly assessed both the space and the plantings. Some decisions were simple. The huge, space-sapping macrocarpa hedge had to go. Other plants were "lovely, but just not in this garden".

Not one for wholesale wastage, Cathy packed many of the more valuable inherited plants onto a trailer and donated them to a grateful son's fledgling garden.

Cathy and Ross immediately recognised one gem amidst the horticultural mix. A large old, centrally placed rhododendron tree with a twisted and curved trunk was a keeper. They saw potential for it to form a natural division between lawn spaces, and provide an umbrella of colour in spring and summer.

The ability to visualise a reinterpreted garden and identify existing assets has become second nature to Ross. He's been involved in the creative design process for his 25-year working life. Some things are now instinctive.

“It’s that ancient, enduring look you get in European cities and villages; a style that’s easy to live with.”

“My approach is to age the landscape as quickly as possible, by using quality, timeless-looking materials. I also layer plants to achieve depth in both colour and texture.”

He indicates huge urns set unerringly into the garden’s hard landscaping. “Those, for instance, look as if they’ve been under the sea for a century. It’s that ancient, enduring look you get in European cities and villages; a style that’s easy to live with.”

In fact, this particular project, undertaken in six to seven weeks during the bleak 2008 winter, is the type Ross relishes most. He had a passionately interested client – one who consulted him and was willing to listen, and whose ideas changed and evolved. Cathy spent ‘countless hours’ planning and thinking about what she wanted. Vance painted walls and dug in hundreds of buxus plants. Ross believes good design should be an evolutionary process, because not everything goes exactly to plan.

The relatively small garden now feels much larger than it actually is, including interesting features from every vantage point, with enough robust hard landscaping to easily accommodate numerous guests. The paving echoes the white of the roses and the charcoal of fences and mondo grasses. Nothing jars.

Ross and Cathy have punctuated the greenery with white, red and black throughout. Three birches were chosen for their stark white trunks, lit from beneath to dramatic effect. Underlying hostas were similarly selected for their delicately white-edged leaves.

Red accent shades will appear as the seasons change. There will be the flame-red of Boston ivy in autumn, red rhododendron flowers in spring, and two dark red maples standing sentinel year-round.

Other favourites of Cathy’s are her port-wine magnolias, her conifer walk at the side of the house, and the comfrey carpet near the entranceway. She’s even taken great delight in planting a compact vegetable garden by the washing line.

“I find just being here therapeutic, the way children must feel, playing in a sand-pit. This is my chill-out zone,” she says. **H**

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Designer: Ross Marriott
of Artworks Landscape
Ltd, Christchurch
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^ Planting includes cycads, bromeliads, viburnum and bright flowers.

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illustration Bruce Bryant



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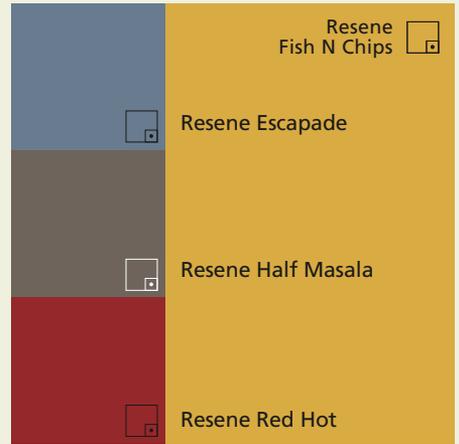
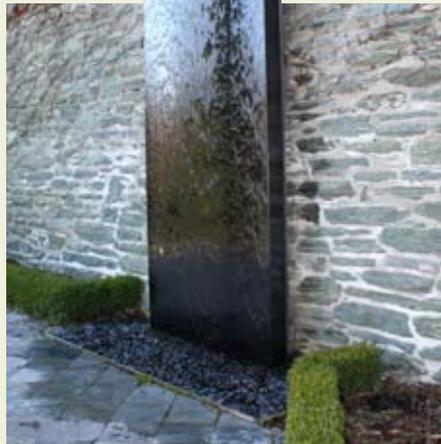
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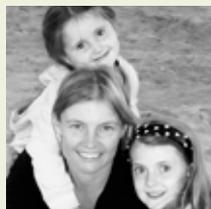


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The existing design has a great use of space, a calm colour scheme and simple lines. I have given the area a more exotic feel by introducing fire, water, stone and lush planting. The Ecosmart fire will add ambiance for evening entertaining and the water feature will provide a relaxing background sound. Comfortable Dedon furniture will encourage time spent relaxing in this space. Resene Half Masala has been chosen for the plastered walls as a weighty earthy neutral to simplify the area and tone in with the acid-etched coloured concrete and stonemat inlay. Low-maintenance evergreen palms are chosen for year-round interest, height and structure and are complemented with bold foliage, bright red canna flowers and scented jasmine.

Tina McHarg
 Landscape designer Tina McHarg suggests this alternative scheme:

phone 07 827 3593 email tkdesign@slingshot.co.nz



^ Plants used include pomegranate, rosemary 'Mozart', feijoa, crabapple, sunflowers, red gladioli and grape vine espalier.

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illustration Bruce Bryant



Mosaic window box
Liz Earth, Te Awanga
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planted with rosemary and herbs



Sunflower



Mirror mosaic egg
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Macrocarpa table and bench seats

Peter Maclean
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Red pottery dishes,
used as bird baths

Jackie Crespin
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Jenny Horne

of Jenny Horne Garden Design
suggests this alternative scheme:

This is very much an indigenous garden, using local artists and craftspeople, and is also a highly useful garden, full of fruit trees, vines and vegetables, many set within macrocarpa-edged square gardens. Aside from being able to eat the produce of the garden and pick the flowers, the herbs provide an aromatic backdrop when relaxing in the area and the flowers and fruit attract birdlife. The house has been repainted in a scheme of green, deep red and clear blue while the lines of the garden are kept quite crisp to complement the house. The garden uses renewable timbers and porous paving materials.



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