

NATURE STUDY



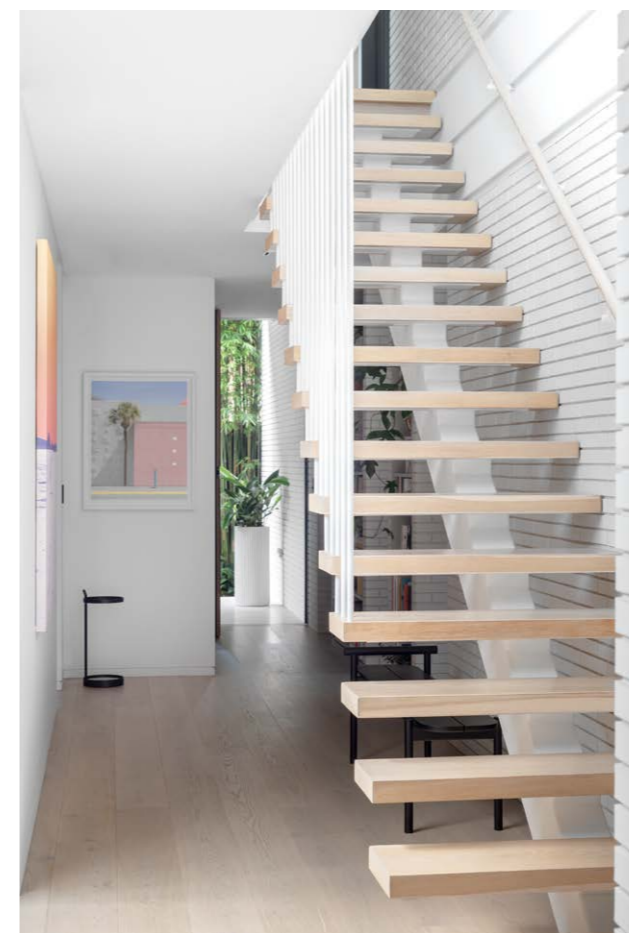
Words CHRIS PEARSON Photography NICHOLAS WATT

House and garden meld seamlessly into one in this Sydney property owned by interiors-savvy landscaping professionals.

This page The 1967 Mercedes 250SL roadster at the new formal front entrance gives the clue that this is no ordinary home – and the statement giant taro (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) and dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) flanking the driveway suggest it could be owned by serious plant buffs. Sculptform blackbutt battens finished in Rubio Monocoat in 'White Wash'. 'Luca' natural stone crazy paving from Eco Outdoor. House painted in Dulux 'Lexicon'. **Opposite page** The plant theme continues in the living room, the greenery handsomely offset by a monochromatic palette. 'Gaston' armchairs from Poliform. B&B Italia 'Frank' sofa from Space. 'Sequence' coffee table from Coco Flip. Fredericia 'Magazine' table from Cult. Ben-Or 'Hand Built' #1, #14 and #18 sculptures on shelves from Planet. Walls in Dulux 'Lexicon' and V-groove in matt black. Joinery in Polytec 'Ravine' in Natural Oak and drawers and bench in Caesarstone 'Raw Concrete' surface. Fireplace from Escea. Flooring in Covet polished concrete terrazzo overlay.



This page Skylights ensure the home is bathed in natural light and offers vertical and horizontal outlooks throughout. B&B Italia 'Eileen' dining table from Space. 'Aava' sled dining chairs from Stylecraft. Flos 'Aim' pendant lights from Euroluce. Bent sculpture by Matthew Cantwell. Custom rug from Armadillo. *The Building* artwork by Robert Ryan. **Opposite page, from top** 'Bobby' stools from DesignByThem. Benchtops and splashback in Caesarstone 'Raw Concrete'. Joinery facades in Polytec 'Ravine' in Natural Oak, Laminex 'AbsoluteMatte' in White and Laminex 'Impressions' in Black Nuance. Gessi 'Emporio' tap from Abey. Wolf 'E' and 'M' Series ovens from Sub-Zero Wolf. 'Pitter Patter' umbrella stand from Blu Dot. The artwork at the end is by George Byrne while the other work is a photo of the family graphically treated and printed on canvas. 'Hoshi' bench seat from Stylecraft under the stairs. Morada 'Blanco Linear' bricks from PGH.

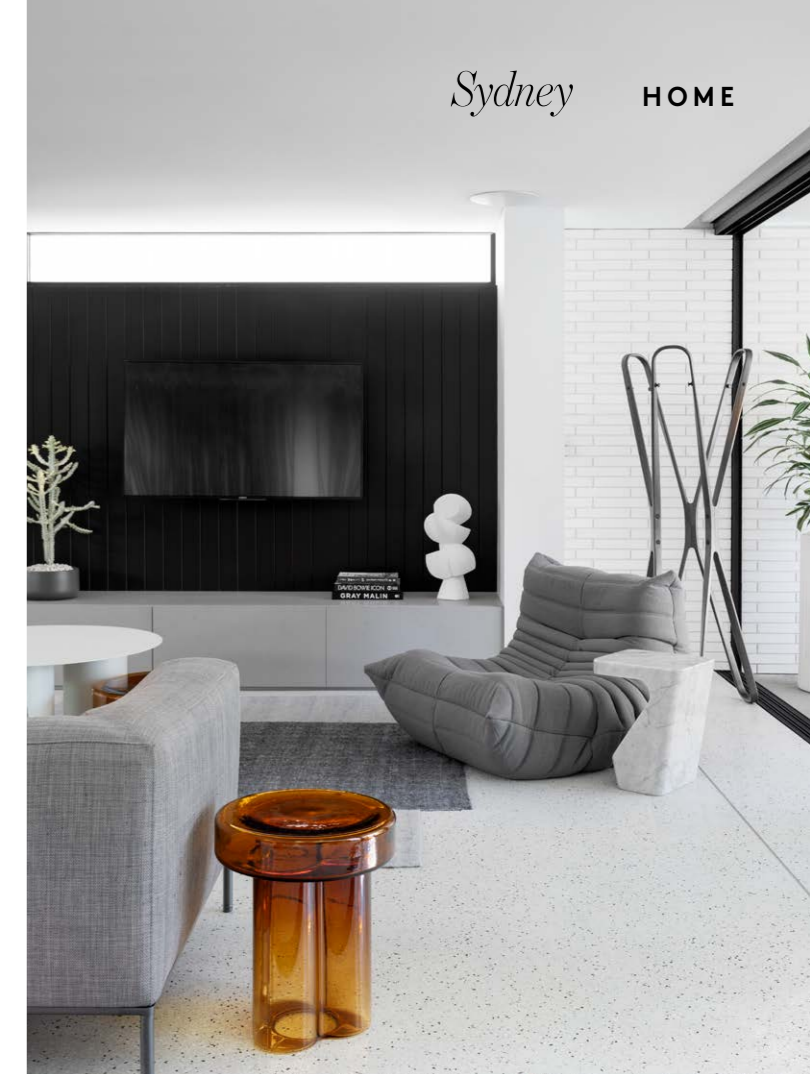


Like images in iconic 3D View-Masters that have captivated children over the years, this home in the eastern suburbs provides special moments of visual discovery. With inside and outside intimately entwined, the house reveals corners of garden from every room. Striking courtyard vignettes and teasing glimpses through slivers of glazing lead to the ultimate spectacle, a soaring expanse of sky and greenery enjoyed from the open plan. When the owners of this light-filled house are Matt Cantwell and Rochelle Abood of the aptly named Secret Gardens little wonder they have a garden that beckons to be explored.

Their new house, designed by Spicer Architecture, includes two wings, with living areas in one and bedrooms in the other, separated by two double-storey voids, one with a courtyard where sculptural succulents reach for the sky. While the home is owned by landscape professionals, there's nothing earthbound in the uplifting feeling it generates. It's a brilliant architectural solution to a long, svelte block – which, although 70 metres long, is just nine metres wide.

When the couple bought the property in 2010 for themselves and their three children, now all teenagers, they were drawn to the site, within cooee of the beach but also quiet and secluded. "Most neighbouring houses are behind mature trees, so it is green and private," says Rochelle. And that slim site, running west-east, would offer generous northern light along one side and plentiful possibilities for getting close to nature. "Most people focus on the house when house hunting, but, given what we do for a living, we prioritise the outdoor spaces and their potential connection to »

These pages, from left With walls of glazing, the open-plan living area and backyard meld into one. By the pool, Knoll 'Saarinen' side table, '1966' lounge chair by Richard Schultz and 'Bertoia Diamond' chair, all from De De Ce. Moooi 'Container' dining table and SP01 'Chee' outdoor chairs from Space. Range of pots in Salt finish from Hibernate Outdoors. Plants include fiddle-leaf fig (*Ficus lyrata*), aloe 'Bush Baby Yellow' and cone cactus (*Neobuxbaumia polylopha*). Ego pavers and pool coping from Di Lorenzo. Morada 'Blanco Linear' chimney cladding from PGH Bricks & Pavers. In the living area, B&B Italia 'Frank' sofa from Space. Miniforms 'Soda' side table from James Richardson Furniture. Ligne Roset 'Togo' fireside chair from Domo. 'Stump' marble side table from Ligne Roset. ClassiCon 'Saturn' timber coat stand with metal hooks from Anibou. On shelf *Figure 12* sculpture in limestone by Lucas Wearne from Curatorial+Co. 'Nobsa' rug in Ochre/Grey from Halcyon Lake.



« the house,” she says. “We felt the site’s unconventional aspects provided a great opportunity to create a home full of surprises.”

But the existing house, which had been serially renovated, failed to optimise the indoor-outdoor connection, so the couple started afresh. On the list for Tim Spicer Architects principal Jonathan Spicer were spaces to suit a family with three young adults, offering myriad communal zones and me-time areas, both inside and outside, for them, their friends and their family.

“Importantly, we needed to allow light and air into the house through large windows and doors and internal courtyards,” says Rochelle. When the couple moved in, they undertook stage one, “a reasonably large renovation to the western end”, which included opening the living areas to the garden with expansive glass doors, extending the eaves to create a covered outdoor dining area, building a pool and landscaping. In 2020, they demolished the rest of the house, retaining the kitchen and living room slab. Most of the ground floor and a first-floor parents’ retreat is brand new.

Taking advantage of two entrances, they flipped the house, making the formal entrance at the eastern side rather than via the garden and living areas as it had been. “By cantilevering the first floor at the eastern end to create a covered car space, we focused on having it appear as the more conventional front of the house. We had turned what was the front garden into our rear, with pool. But this is still where our guests enter, due to easy parking.” Above the double garage at the original entrance, they added a self-contained studio. Multipurpose, it is used for working from home, as a winter lounge or guest accommodation.

On a long, narrow block, the house was designed with internal garden areas, which allow it to sit from boundary to boundary while also optimising natural light and offering garden glimpses. “We wanted the garden to be incorporated into every »



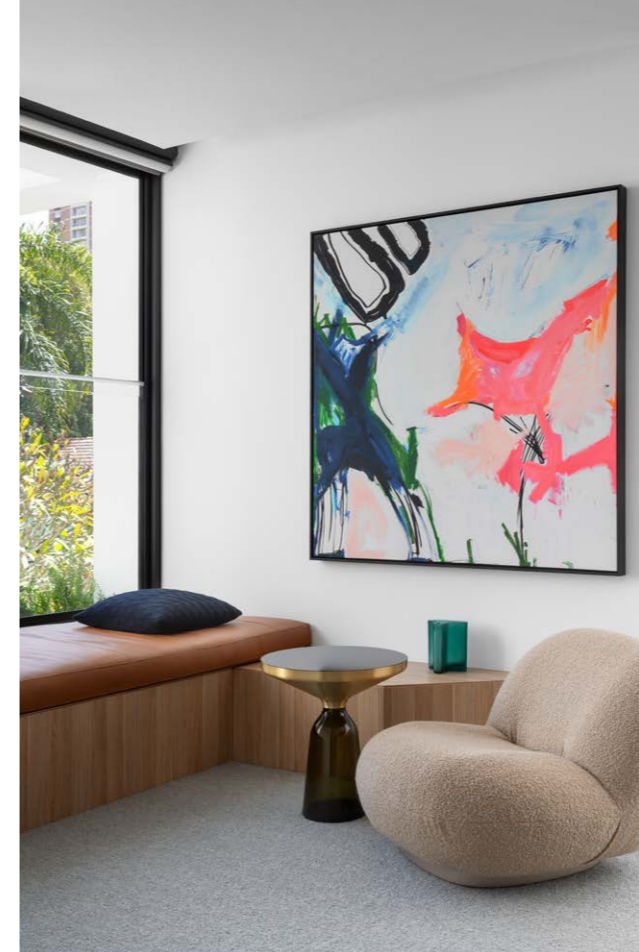
This page In the media room and study area, LaForma 'Zadine' wool dining chair in Green from Life Interiors at the desk in Laminex 'Black Nuance'. 'Delta' sofa from King. 'Holloway' nesting wooden round table in Natural from Interior Secrets. Artwork by Stephen Dupont from his book *Raskols*. Flos 'Mod 265' wall lamp from Euroluce. Timber battens on doors in American oak painted in matt black. Eterno 'Grande' flooring in Bistre from Tongue n Groove. **Opposite page** On the New Guinea Rosewood deck of the studio and home office above the garage, Point coffee table from Domo and Carl Hansen & Søn 'CH25' chairs from Cult. Cladding from Alucobond. Eterno 'Grande' flooring in Bistre from Tongue n Groove. Olive tree (*Olea europaea*), bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus* 'Kings Park Special') and Madagascar ocotillo (*Alluaudia procera*) all form part of the lush garden outlook.



This page The imposing wall, in matt-black V-groove cladding, adds its strong presence to the main bedroom. Readymade 'Rupert' bed in Boston Asphalt linen from Heatherly Design. Custom joinery in American oak stained in matt black. 'Lisburn' carpet from Bremworth. 'Monti' lava stone side table in dressing room from West Elm. Dressing room joinery in Polytec 'Ravine' oak.

SPEED READ

» When Matt Cantwell and Rochelle Abood, of Sydney landscape design firm Secret Gardens, bought this property in Sydney's eastern suburbs, they were drawn to its quietness, closeness to the beach and the long, slender lot with its broad northern aspect. » But it was occupied by a house that failed to optimise those assets. After opening up the living areas to the generous garden, they demolished the rest of the house and started afresh. » They wanted communal spaces that provide for easy entertaining and family gatherings, while also offering break-out spaces, so important for a family with three teenagers. » Walls of glazing and tantalising glimpses through smaller openings offer a visual connection to nature from every room, with skylights looking directly into the canopy ensuring no room is left out. » The result is a home that generates calm and serenity throughout.



« room,” says Rochelle, “but, in some instances, this was only possible through large skylights looking up into the tree canopy.” They employed a smart professional trick. “We drew neighbouring garden vistas into our sightlines to visually expand the site.”

The interiors were a collaboration between designer Trudi Scrymgour of Form Follows Function and Rochelle. “We prefer a contemporary style,” says Rochelle, “simple and refined, with mid-century influences. The interior palette, pared back to complement the outdoors, is white, grey and black with the warmth of light oak. Light materials also add to the feeling of openness and space.” White brick walling forms the spine of the home and provides textural detail. It also pops up on feature walls in the bedrooms and cladding front and back. “I love it. It’s so slimline and modern and reinforces the connection between inside and out,” she says.

Classic, timeless furniture gathered over the years includes favourites such as Poliform ‘Gaston’ leather chairs, a Halcyon Lake rug – “the shape is unique and the colours add warmth” – a B&B Italia dining table – “we have had it for over 20 years. We love the orange base and it has hosted many dinner parties.” The outdoor dining area is anchored by a Moooi ‘Container’ table. “We searched for a long time for a large round table. It is lovely to share a meal at – everyone is included in the conversation and it suits the area well.”

With that strong natural connection, little wonder Matt and Rochelle unwind the minute they turn the key in the door. “There is such a sense of calm throughout, as every room looks out onto a garden, greenery and nature, which gives it a tranquil aspect,” says Rochelle. “This proved invaluable, as soon after we moved back in, the second Sydney lockdown happened – it was a nice space to be locked down in.” secretgardens.com.au; spicerarchitecture.com; formfollowsfunction.com.au; prideandpassion.com.au



This page, clockwise from top The main bedroom, complete with banquette window seat, looks out over a rooftop garden planted with hardy grasses towards a vista of sky and established trees at the rear of the property. Cushions on banquette custom-made in Tobacco leather. Gubi ‘Pacha’ lounge chair from Cult. ClassiCon ‘Bell’ side table from Anibou. Joinery in Polytec ‘Ravine’ oak. ‘Lisburn’ carpet from Bremworth. Two Top Paddocks artwork by Kerry Armstrong from Studio Gallery. The inner courtyard beside the stairs. Blackbutt battens finished in Rubio ‘White Wash’ from Sculptform. Soaring cacti, including candelabra tree (*Euphorbia ingens*), silver torch cactus (*Cleistocactus strausii*) and elephant cactus (*Pachycereus pringlei*), create a dramatic focal point. In a ground-floor bathroom. ‘Margot’ above-counter basin in Matte White and ‘Ashley’ vanity in Matte Black with ‘Friday’ quartz top from ADP Bathroom. Milli ‘Pure Progressive’ wall mixer, Mizu ‘Drift’ shower and shower head and Mizu ‘Drift’ handshower, all in Matt Black from Reece. Subway wall tiles and terrazzo floor tiles all in Matt White from Di Lorenzo.

