Surf Garden

Darrin and Kiersten Jones recently renovated their 50 year old home on Sydney's northern beaches. Although the house was finished they didn't know what to do with the garden so the Blitz team stepped in. Darrin, Kiersten and their two daughters, Lara and Nadia, were sent for a two day family getaway to Port Stephens on the NSW north coast, while the team got stuck into the garden.

Kiersten and Darrin have committed many years to keeping our beaches safe through their service in The Royal Life Saving Society Australia. In return, landscape architect and sculptor Richard Stutchbury has created a unique beachside theme for their backyard complete with surf-inspired sculptures.

The rear deck area has been opened up to overlook a paved sitting area. A pergola echoes the waves of the ocean with a curved fascia, and clear Laserlite roofing allows sunlight in but reduces the suns harmful UV rays. A surf-reel sculpture has been created using sandstone and coloured tiles, with lines of brick edging infilled with decomposed granite reflecting the surf-lines and sand of the coast. Mature specimens of gardenia, murraya and wonga wonga vine will create fragrance during the warmer months, whilst lilly pilly, magnolia and the existing crepe myrtle will provide height and privacy to the space. A variety of colourful and tufted groundcovers will create a sense of texture and beachside casualness to the garden.

What we did: We cleared out all unwanted plants, pruned those plants to remain and levelled the garden beds and paving areas. Existing turf was removed using a turf cutter and the side steps to the deck and some of the concrete slab in front of the shed were removed using a jackhammer and dry demolition saw. An enclosed deck was opened up by removing the aluminium

cladding, installing new timber posts and a central set of steps. The shed and the clothesline were tucked away behind the pergola, and a colourful, curved screen in the rear corner provided a support for the climbing wonga wonga vine. A couch lawn was laid to provide space for the girls to play.

Materials

Paving: concrete pavers ('Sunstone' Cobblestone pavers 225x200mm and 50mm thick), road base, paving sand, grouting sand, readymix concrete. *Tools:* safety goggles, ear protection, brick saw, wheelbarrow, shovel, screed, screed rails, brickie's trowel, broom, plate compactor, carpet and wire.

Brick edging: 'Sharolai Cream' bricks from Boral, readymix sandcement. An insert of decomposed granite was used between the brick strips. *Tools:* wheelbarrow, stringline, spirit-level, brickies trowel, shovel, trenching shovel, bucket and sponge. ***Blitz Tipz:*** decomposed granite can be used on your garden as a mulch or as a paving surface. Some landscape suppliers will mix cement through the decomposed granite prior to delivery. This allows the granite to be compacted and to form a stable and permeable paved surface.

Lawn: turf underlay from landscape suppliers, 'Stadium' couch turf. *Tools:* lawn leveller, shovel, wheelbarrow, roller.

Sandstone sculptures: large blocks of sandstone, tiles, grout, tile adhesive. *Tools:* angle grinder, scutch hammer, bolster, small pointed cold chisels, sponge, wet and dry sandpaper. ***Blitz Tipz:*** - These works were created by a professional and are a one-off design. A similar feature could be created by using the tools above and some creative carving and smoothing of the stone.

Deck and steps: dressed all round (DAR) hardwood posts (100x100x2400mm), galvanised cup head bolts (120x12mm) washers and nuts, DAR hardwood stringers (300x50mm), treads (150x50mm), threaded or booker rod (12mm diameter) washers and nuts, galvanised nails (75mm). *Tools:* circular saw, electric plane, chisel, hammer, nail punch, ruler, spirit level, tape measure, adjustable square, stringline, bevel, electric drill and auger bit (12mm), adjustable spanner, pencil, nail gun (or pre-drill nail holes).

Pergola: rougher header treated pine (RHTP) posts (90x90x3000mm), RHTP bearers (190x45x3600mm), RHTP rafters (140x45x3000mm), Laserlite polycarbonate (clear, 'Roma' profile, 1800x820mm), primed battens (140x19x3600mm) (45x19x3600mm) and (50x25x6000mm), primed fascia (140x19mm), cup head bolts (120x10mm) nuts and washers, galvanised timber screws (12x50mm), cup washer roofing screws (12x50mm). *Tools:* circular saw, electric plane, chisel, hammer, nail punch, ruler, spirit level, tape measure, adjustable square, stringline, bevel, electric drill and auger bit (12mm), adjustable spanner, pencil, nail gun (or pre-drill nail holes), flexible conduit.

Garden screen: RHTP posts (90x90x3000mm), primed battens (45x19x3600mm), Rapid Set concrete, nails, paint. *Tools:* circular saw, nail gun, shovel, spirit level, steel ruler, tape measure, pencil, spray gun or paint brush, mineral turpentine, rags, bucket.

Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard. Let 1m on the ground be represented by 1cm on your plan (ie 1:100). Show the location of the house and major features then incorporate the desired elements from our makeover. As your garden will be a different size you will need to estimate the amounts of materials you will require. *Note:* On your plan show the locations of any services (water pipes, sewerage, power, phone, etc) so you can avoid damaging them during the makeover. Dial the 'Dial before you Dig' line on 1100 for information. ***Blitz Tipz:*** Your existing house plans are a great place to start when making your site plan.

Step-by-step

Getting started: Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds etc should be removed and the site levelled. When levelling ensure adequate slope away from the house to prevent flooding in heavy rain. If your soil is of poor quality it can be mixed 50:50 with a good organic garden mix. If it is high in clay dig in gypsum or an organic clay breaker.

Paving

Blitz Tipz: When excavating for pavers allow 75-100mm for the depth of the road base, 50mm for paving sand plus the depth of your pavers.
Step 1 Mark out the area to be paved. Excavate to required heights, bring in road base to a depth of approximately 75-100mm and compact using a plate compactor. Bring in paving sand and tread into place about 50mm deep. Set up screed rails to 50mm below finished paving level. Screed off paving sand to an even surface. Ensure the finished levels of paving will encourage water to flow in the right direction, usually away from the house.
Step 2 Start laying the pavers along the longest straight edge of the area to be paved, using a stringline to keep them in position. If any of the pavers need to be cut use a brick saw or angle grinder.
Blitz Tipz: A brick saw can be hired for about $130 a day.
Step 3 Excavate a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paving (unless up against a solid structure) and fill with concrete (mix as per instructions on bag). Use a trowel to compact concrete against the side of the pavers taking care not to mound it too high against the edge of the paver, allow to set. This retains the paving sand in place.

Step 4 The pavers were tamped into position by running the plate compactor over the top of the pavers (pavers were protected by connecting a piece of carpet to the underside of the base plate). Alternatively, the pavers can be tamped into position using a lump hammer and a solid block of wood. Sprinkle grouting sand (fine sand such as Sydney sand) over the paving and sweep to fill the gaps.
Blitz Tipz: Grouting sand flows best when completely dry so lightly sprinkle a layer over the paving and allow to bake in the sun for a couple of hours before sweeping in.

Brick edging

House bricks were used to define the lawn and garden beds and to form a decorative feature.
Step 1 The shape was marked out on the ground and a shallow trench was dug (about 100mm).
Step 2 Bricks were laid on a bed of mortar with 10mm joints between each brick. Each brick was tapped into place and checked for level. To achieve a curve, one side of the mortar joint was expanded and the brick turned accordingly.
Step 3 Mortar was allowed to firm and all excess mortar cleaned off the tops of bricks with a sponge and water.
Step 4 Decomposed granite was used as a decorative infill.

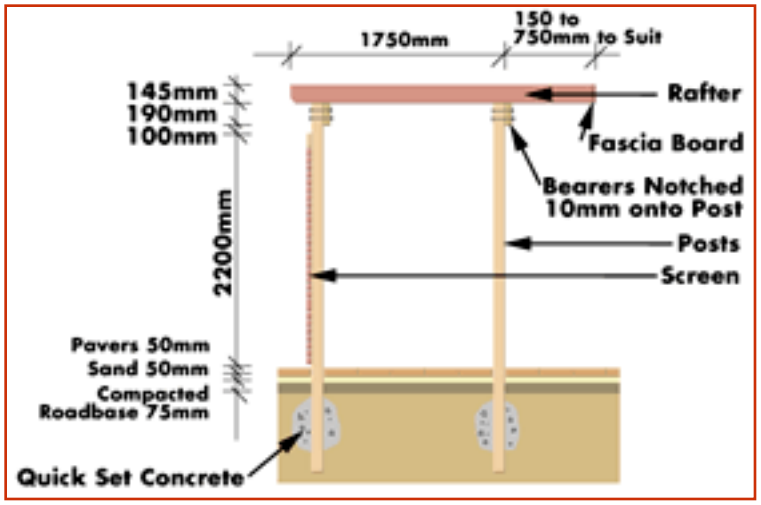
Decking and steps

Step 1 The existing aluminium cladding was removed to open up the deck area. Temporary timber support posts were erected to support the roof as the cladding was removed.
Step 2 The new posts were cut to length and notched at either end to fit around the decking and top bearer. These were then bolted into place.
Blitz Tipz: Always consult a builder or architect before attempting any structural changes to buildings and have all the tools and materials on hand before commencing the work.

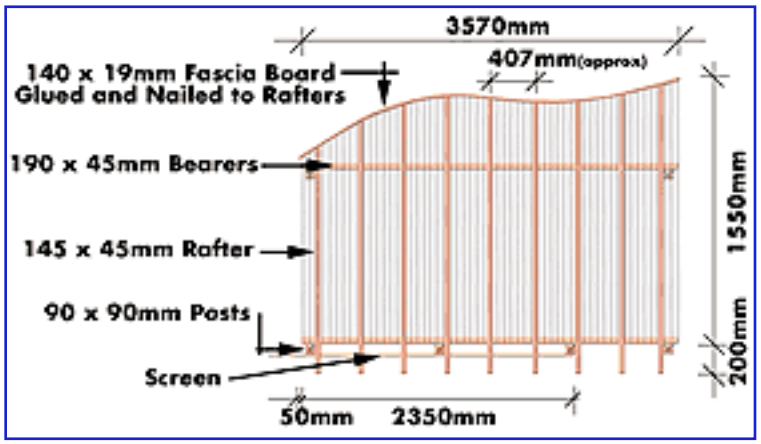
Step 3 The steps were created using 3 stringers and treads and connecting the steps to the existing bearer. Start by establishing the tread and riser details. Outdoor steps usually have treads between 250mm and 350mm deep, and risers between 150mm to 200mm high.
Step 4 Our stringer lengths were established and tread positions marked on each. A bevel was used to ensure the base of each stringer sat evenly on the pavers at the same angle. A channel (housing) into which each tread would slide was created by cutting along marked positions with a circular saw to a depth of 15mm. A hammer and chisel knocked out the waste.

Step 5 Stringers were attached to the deck bearer. Holes were drilled in each stringer, below the treads to pass the threaded rod through. Treads were knocked into the housings created earlier, and nailed into the stringers. ***Blitz Tipz:*** Threaded or booker rod passed between two stringers (see photo) and connected with washers and nuts will add lateral strength to your steps and reduce the likelihood of them bowing in the middle.

Pergola



Step 1 We marked the position of the pergola and dug holes for the posts about 800mm deep. We ensured the holes were dug in the correct position by using string lines and a tape measure and by applying the 3,4,5 rule.
Blitz Tipz: The 3,4,5 rule enables you to create a right angle triangle and ensure your structures are properly aligned. From one corner of your proposed structure, measure 3m along one side and mark on the ground. In a direction perpendicular to this along the other side of the structure measure 4m along and mark. You now have 2 sides of a triangle which are probably close to a right angle. To check this measure between the 2 points and if this distance is 5m you have a right angled triangle.



Step 2 The posts were placed into the holes. Each hole was 1/3 filled with water and then filled with rapid set concrete to about 100mm below the top of the hole. More water was added to ensure the concrete would set. The concrete was allowed to set before proceeding further.
Step 3 A water level was used to mark the same level at the top of each post approximately 2400mm above the ground. Each post was then cut off at this level. The bearers were temporarily attached to the posts using G-clamps and the position marked. One bearer was attached to the 4 rear posts and the other bearer was attached to the 2 front posts. Each bearer was attached at the same height and level. Holes were drilled using an auger and the bearers were attached using galvanised cup head bolts, nuts and washers.

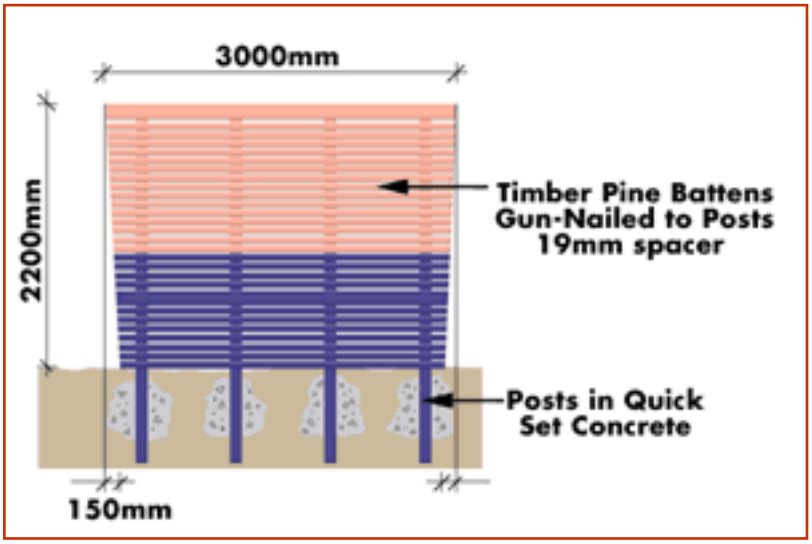
Step 4 Rafters were fixed at 400mm centres on top of and perpendicular to the bearers. A decorative end to each rafter was created by removing one small corner of the rafter. Rafters were skew nailed to bearers ensuring the ends are in line. Battens were nailed to the top edge of and perpendicular to the rafters to accommodate the roof.

Step 5 A curved front fascia was created by cutting the ends of the rafters at different lengths. A piece of flexible conduit was bent along the top of the rafters as a template for marking. Cut rafters along these lines, then glue and screw the fascia into place after cutting shallow grooves in the rear of the fascia to aid bending.

Step 6 The Laserlite roofing was cut to shape and connected to the battens using roofing screws with washers. Each sheet of roofing overlapped the next by about 150mm. Finally, battens were attached perpendicular and horizontal to 3 of the rear posts to provide some screening, similar to the garden screen.

Blitz Tipz: Prepaint all timbers prior to construction to reduce final painting time later.

Garden screen



A colourful, curved screen similar to the rear of the pergola was created using 4 posts and horizontal battens.
Step 1 4 holes about 800mm deep were dug and 3m posts were installed slightly offset from each other to form a gentle curve. Each post hole was 1/3 filled with water, posts installed and then holes filled with rapid set concrete to within 100mm of the top of the hole. More water was added to ensure the concrete set, and no further work undertaken until the concrete had set.
Step 2 A water level was used to mark the same height on the posts about 2200mm above ground. The tops of the posts were removed at this mark.
Step 3 A bottom batten was attached level and perpendicular to the posts using a nail gun. A 400mm overhang beyond the 2 external posts was left. Spacers (19mm) were used between each batten to ensure they were equally spaced. Battens were connected horizontally up the posts with the top of the last batten hiding the top of the posts. Broader battens were installed at the top and about 1/3 of the way up the screen to create interest.

Step 4 The ends of the battens were marked slightly of vertical from top to bottom to create a wedge shaped screen. A circular saw was used to cut along the line and remove the batten ends. A final coat of paint was applied.

Laying the turf

Step 1: Prepare the area for turf by removing all debris and levelling. If your soil is poor, spread a layer of a good quality turf underlay soil mix and level with a topsoil leveller.
Step 2: Roll out the turf starting along the longest straight edge and cutting to shape with hedge shears or spade where required. Roll with a lawn roller and water well.

Sandstone sculptures

The garden's designer created several sculptures using an angle grinder and basic stone masonry tools.

Blitz Tipz: You can commission one-off pieces for the garden from most sculptors. A surf reel sculpture would cost around $885 to commission and the surf posts would cost about $970 for the pair.

Garden beds: The garden beds were filled with organic soil mix. Plant the garden keeping plants at the same depth as they were in their containers. Water thoroughly. Spread a 50mm layer of mulch over the garden. We used leaf litter mulch from a tree surgeon. Contact your local council or tree contractors to obtain prices on their mulch.

Our plants: blue fescue (Festuca glauca), Swan River daisy (Brachyscome multifida), lily turf (Liriope muscari 'Evergreen Giant'), wonga wonga vine (Pandorea pandorana 'Snowbells'), tussock grass (Poa labillardieri 'Eskdale'), orange jessamine (Murraya paniculata), brush cherry (Syzygium australe), white magnolia (Magnolia denudata), gardenia (Gardenia augusta 'Magnifica'), coast rosemary (Westringia fruticosa), westringia (Westringia brevifolia). Turf: 'Stadium' couch.

brush cherry

westringia

murraya

wonga wonga vine

Cost and availability: we used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect. Our total cost of plants and materials was $14,065. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants, reducing the total cost to about $9663.

- Most of the selected plants are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order them for you.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building suppliers, or landscape suppliers.
- Garden sculptures are often found in garden centres or they will have contact details for artists if you wish to commission a piece.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire.

Acknowledgments: Garden design and sandstone sculptures by Richard Stutchbury, Out of the Blue, phone (02) 9973 2807. Construction by the Blitz Team.