

BACKYARD BLITZ

Top Deck Landscape



For Sydney couple Robbie and Fred Oglethorpe, their new home, an old style rooftop beachside apartment, was a bargain buy but it needed renovating. Since moving in Robbie has worked constantly to renovate the apartment and prepare for the birth of their baby girl, Andie. Fred wanted to thank her husband for his constant support and tireless efforts by surprising him with a new rooftop garden.

Under the cover of a birthday surprise Robbie, Fred and Andie had a weekend away in Canberra to enjoy the new National Museum of Australia and visit the Australian National Gallery.

The Backyard Blitz team faced a new challenge with this garden as it was five storeys up with no lift! A construction hoist was erected outside the apartment block to enable materials and equipment to be moved up and down.

Landscape Designer John Happ created a contemporary rooftop garden that enhances the water views from this elevated site. Privacy and shade has been developed beneath an existing pergola. A floating deck was built beneath the pergola and lattice screens connected to the posts to make an enclosed space. Standard weeping figs in large terracotta pots edge a synthetic turf play area. Large reconstituted sandstone troughs have been planted with fragrant gardenias. A glazed water bowl and fountain provide the calming sounds of trickling water.



Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard (eg 1:100) showing 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.

Permits and approval: council permission is required for some structural work. If you live in a Strata or Company Title property you may need to consult the body corporate prior to undertaking certain activities as well. Rooftop gardens can be fraught with danger as you may be held liable for any water damage that occurs during or following completion of the work. There are regulations regarding balustrade types and heights and a range of other safety issues to consider with gardens of this nature. It is strongly recommended that you seek professional advice prior to undertaking a project like this.

Materials

Decking: all decking should be constructed of appropriately preservative treated structural grade timber. A pool liner (5x9.5m) was laid over the existing rooftop membrane and beneath the joists to maintain the integrity of the membrane. This deck consisted of a stud frame levelled out on the existing rooftop using plastic Pak Wedges. Joists were (75x50mm) and the decking boards were 90x20mm treated pine. Stainless steel Titadeck (pronounced tight a deck) nails were used to connect the boards to the joists.



Blitz Tipz A common problem with decking is nails rising out of the decking boards as the timber shrinks and swells. Using nails with a twisted shank such as Titadeck nails will avoid this problem.

Synthetic turf: a synthetic turf was laid beyond the deck to create a soft-surfaced, open play area. An adhesive was spread with a toothed spreader and the turf slowly rolled and trodden into place. **Note:** consult a professional before installing synthetic turf on a rooftop site as a specific adhesive may be required to avoid damage to the existing waterproof membrane.



Blitz Tipz Joins were made by slightly overlapping the edge of the turf and gluing in place. The overlap disappears as the glue dries because it all shrinks a little.

Lighting: a low voltage lighting system (12 volt) was installed in the pots beneath the standard figs. A low voltage transformer was plugged into an existing power point and connected to a run of low voltage wire which powered the lights. We ran our cabling beneath the turf and decking, punched a hole in the turf and ran the cable up inside the pots. 20 watt bulbs were fitted in a Lumascope spike mounted adjustable upright. These lights were powdercoated and black in colour but are also available in a range of other colours as well as solid copper or brass. **Blitz Tipz** If installing landscape lighting yourself try to locate the power console in the most central location possible and make a cable run in two directions instead of one long run to ensure each lamp receives the full voltage needed to perform properly.

Planter boxes: large reconstituted sandstone troughs (670x670x570mm) held standard figs and rectangular troughs (1000x400x400mm) contained gardenias. Low voltage landscape lights on swivelling uprights were placed in each pot to highlight the underside of the fig canopies. **Note:** the pots were kept a metre away from the railing to keep the area safe and childproof.



Water feature: a large glazed terracotta bowl (1m diameter) was used for a water feature. To insert the necessary wires to operate the low voltage pump, we drilled a 13mm hole drilled in its base. A Hozelock Cascade 1400 (24 volt) pump and a low voltage transformer were used. A 3 core 0.5mm low voltage wire connected the pump to the transformer. The hole in the base of the bowl was sealed using Sikaflex (a polyurethane sealant and adhesive). A tiled feature base laid over tile adhesive on a sheet of 10mm marine ply surrounded the water bowl. A timber edge retained the tiles and adhesive. Beige, light blue and dark blue tiles (Ceraniche Guocera, 100x100mm) were laid in a diamond pattern and grouted with ivory coloured grout. **Blitz Tipz** Prior to laying tiles, space out the pattern to ensure you have sufficient materials and that the pattern will be easy to assemble. You can reduce the number of cuts required through careful planning.



Table: a colourful new table top was built using marine ply as a table top and 90x90mm posts as legs. The table top was decorated using tile adhesive and Ceraniche Guocera 100x100mm tiles. An ivory coloured grout was used to grout the tiles and cleaned off with a sponge and water. The table was finished with a maple edging, which was tacked and glued into place. **Blitz Tipz** To avoid having to cut tiles, work out the width and length of the table in whole tiles.



Painting: the existing pergola was painted with 'Thunderclap' and the timber table was painted with 'Blue Nouveau', both from Bristol paints. The eaves were painted with 'Clotted Cream' from Dulux. The iron balustrades were repainted white using Bristol Weathertough. **Blitz Tipz** Metalwork in exposed locations will often have rust spots. Remove all rust and paint flakes with a stiff wire brush, paint with a metal protecting paint (such as Galmet) then apply the finish coat.

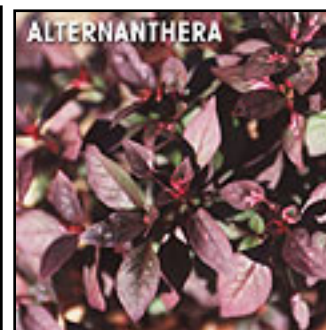
Lattice: pre-framed lattice screens were installed between the pergola posts and connected with galvanised screws.

Blitz Tipz Stop long spans of lattice from sagging by installing timber blocks between the ground and the bottom edge of the framing.

Plants

A repetition of attractive and hardy plants created a formal, low maintenance garden in this exposed site. All are suited to growing in pots.

Standard weeping fig (*Ficus microcarpa* var. *hillii*), gardenia (*Gardenia augusta* 'Ocean Pearl' also sold as 'Veitchii'), alternanthera (*Alternanthera* 'Purple Splash'), dwarf philodendron (*Philodendron* 'Xanadu').



Cost and availability

We used some mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. As a result, our total cost of plants and materials was \$13,118. This cost could be reduced to \$10,502 by using smaller plants.

Product details:

- Glazed water bowl cost \$500 from Motyaj Pottery in Sydney; phone: (02) 9618 6866.
- House of Ceramic and Stone in Sydney provided the tiles for the water feature surround; phone: (02) 9744 7735 for details.
- The decorative bronze frog fountain cost \$225 from Parterre Garden in Sydney; phone: (02) 9363 5874.
- Lumascape lights were supplied by Bob Richardson of Acclaimed Landscape Lighting in Sydney; phone: (02) 9487 7770. The transformer cost about \$200, each light fitting is \$84 and long life halogen lamps are \$12.10 each.
- The bright and cheerful hammocks cost \$100 each and are available from the Mexican Hammock Company in Sydney; phone: (02) 9557 5074 for your nearest stockists.
- Supergrass synthetic turf from Balsam Pacific Pty Ltd cost \$27/m², excluding glue. The glue cost \$120 for a 20 litre tin. Check under 'Sporting surfaces - synthetic' in your local Yellow Pages for similar products.
- Most of the plants we used are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order them for you or advise similar varieties suited to your area. You may need to contact specialist nurseries for some plants. Your local nursery should be able to provide contacts to you.
- Pak Wedges are available from SE Discount Timber Yard, NSW, phone: (02) 9699 3388 and Midcoast Timber, NSW, phone: (02) 9809 0731. Cost \$10.50 packet of 20 or boxes of various sizes \$31.50. For more information phone: (02) 6332 1939 or fax orders to (02) 6332 5819. For all other states please email: pakwedge@ix.net.au

- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire although some items, such as the materials hoist will require a licensed operator.

Getaway details

Accommodation: Bentley Suites, Canberra. For information on where to stay in Canberra ring Canberra Visitor Centre; phone: (02) 6205 0044. Website: www.canberratourism.com.au
Tours: National Museum of Australia; phone: Free Call 1800 026 132. Website: www.nma.gov.au

Acknowledgements

Design by John Happ of 3rd Dimension Designs; phone: (02) 9744 2658.
Construction by the Backyard Blitz team (all gardens are a gift from Backyard Blitz).

For the **Revisiting Old Friends** fact sheet [click here](#).

For more **Step by Step Constructions** [click here](#)



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