

BACKYARD BLITZ

Japanese Garden

In 1973 Keryn White and Ken Goff were high school sweethearts. Their young romance only lasted a year and it wasn't until their school reunion in 1996 that they met again. Some 23 years of separation melted away and the romance was rekindled. Today they live in a townhouse with a tiny, featureless triangular backyard. Both have a passion for bonsai plants. The Blitz team decided to create a Japanese garden to display the couple's collection of bonsai plants.



Landscape designer Colin Brown's plan was for a Japanese-inspired garden with three 'rooms'. The front room has a miniature maple forest, large granite stepping stones, white crushed quartz, azaleas and cane clad walls. Next is the bonsai room where Ken and Keryn's bonsai plants are featured on hardwood pedestals. There is a utility room at the back, screened off by a large centre-pivoting door.



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What we did

We cleared out the backyard and removed the turf. The existing metal colorbond fence was covered in cane reed cladding, with fern reed capping. A fern reed clad pivoting gate was built to screen off the utility area and a cane reed fence with saloon-style doors enclosed the bonsai room. Decorative screens were built to hide the hot water service and used as a wall hanging. The entire area was paved in white crushed quartz. Hardwood pedestals were positioned to display the bonsai collection, a garden seat was built, the feature rock positioned, granite stepping stones laid and the garden planted.

Materials

Cane walls: cane reed wall cladding, fern reed cladding (Natureed) cladding, galvanised fence wire, tie wire, shackles, eye bolts with washers and nuts. *Optional:* posts - hardwood (100x50mm), fast setting concrete (40kg bags). *Tools:* drill, wire cutters, adjustable spanner, flat bladed screw driver, hammer. *Optional:* post hole shovel.

Pivot gate: posts - hardwood (100x50mm), timber - hardwood (50x50mm), fast setting concrete (40kg bags), threaded rod with washers and nuts, galvanised wire, shackles, tek screws (75mm), fern reed cladding (Natureed), bitumen coating (Gripset), galvanised nails and tie wire. *Tools:* spirit level, circular saw, drill, paint brush, and wire cutters.

Saloon gates: posts - hardwood (100x50mm), timber - hardwood (50x50mm), fast setting concrete (40kg bags), bamboo cladding, reed cladding (Natureed), eye bolts with washers and nuts, tek screws (75mm), tie wire, galvanised wire, shackles, bitumen coating (Gripset), galvanised nails, galvanised hinges and screws, dowel rod (20mm). *Tools:* post hole shovel, drill, adjustable spanner, paint brush, wire cutters, circular saw, hammer or nail gun, flat bladed screw driver.

Decorative screens: timber treated pine (50x50mm), compressed abaca fibre sheets (Renaturit), construction adhesive, galvanised nails and staples, bitumen coating (Gripset), sealant or lacquer. *Tools:* circular saw, caulking gun, staple gun, hammer, paint brush.

Paving: decomposed granite, A1 crushed quartz sand (or fine pebbles), granite off-cuts, brickies sand, cement. *Tools:* rake, wheelbarrow, brickies trowel.

Garden seat: timber (350x50mm), bitumen coating (Gripset). *Tools:* circular saw, paint brush, hammer.

Garden beds: plants (see list below), compost (BioGrow), feature rock (synthetic). *Tools:* shovel, rake.

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. 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 organic clay breaker.

Cane wall cladding

We clad the existing fence with a cane reed to give the wall a bamboo look. The cladding we used was 300mm higher than the existing fence and the top was capped with Natureed cladding. The existing colorbond fence was strong enough to attach the cladding support wires to without the need for additional posts. **Note:** If you are unable to attach the cladding support wires to your existing fence you will need to install end posts.



See 'Pivot gate' **Step 2** below for the procedure, then paint, leave the concrete to set overnight and attach the support wires.

Step 1 Clear any rubbish or old structures away from the fence line, measure 300mm up from ground level and 300mm down from the top at each end, drill and attach eye bolts at these points. Starting at one end attach a 1m length of galvanised wire to the top eye bolt and a shackle to its other end. Attach a length of galvanised wire to the top eye bolt at the other end and run it back to the shackle. Thread the wire through the eye of the shackle, pull it as tight as possible by hand and tie it off. If needed, wind the shackle to tension the wire further. Repeat procedure for the bottom wire. **Blitz Tipz:** To attach the wire loop it through the eye and tightly wind it back around itself several times.

Step 2 Attach one end of a roll of cane cladding to the eye bolts at one end of the fence. Use short lengths of tie wire looped through the eye bolt and around the end cane. Use a pair of pliers to tightly wind the wire around itself and trim the ends.

Blitz Tipz: Tidy up the look of the tie wires by gently tapping the knot behind the cane and out of view using a flat bladed screwdriver and hammer. **Step 3** Unroll the cane cladding and pull tight. Connect the next roll by tie wiring the end canes together, unroll and pull tight. Continue until you reach the end. Cut off the excess by first pulling the cladding very tight, marking the point which coincides with the end set of eye bolts, then cutting. Attach to the eye bolts.



Step 4 Attach the cladding to the support wires using tie wires every 600mm.

Step 5 To attach the fern reed capping cut 300mm lengths off the end of the roll. Fold the ends under, position it on top of the fence, and secure with tie wire. Continue working along the top of the fence ensuring the capping is even before you secure it. You may need to cut the end piece to length with a pair of pruning shears.

Pivot gate

A pivot gate was built to gain entry to the utility area in the back corner of the yard. The utility area is triangular in shape and the gate pivot was offset slightly to one side to the make best use of the space. The gate is supported by a frame consisting of uprights and cross beams - one above and one below. The gate was made the same width as the fern reed screen we used to clad it. There was 10mm clearance between the gate and frame around all sides. The gate was constructed by butting the horizontal members into the vertical ones, screwing together and cross bracing with wire.

Step 1 Build the gate support posts by cutting 4 lengths of timber (100x50mm) to the desired

lengths (our Japanese styled design called for the timber lengths to be uneven) and cutting 6 pieces to 200mm in length. Lay one of the long pieces of timber on the ground and locate 3 of the shorter pieces irregularly and unevenly along its length, nailing them into position. Lay another long piece on top with the bottom ends even and nail. Repeat this procedure to build the other support post, they should not be identical.

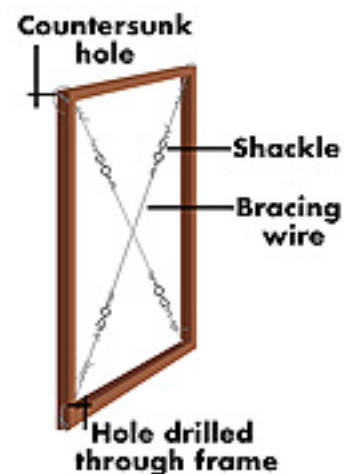
Step 2 Mark out the position of the posts and use an auger or shovel to dig post holes 600mm deep. Place a post in its hole. While using a spirit level to ensure the post is exactly vertical, half fill the hole with water then tip in a bag of fast setting concrete, watering and stirring as you go. The concrete should be filled to the top of the hole. Hold the post in position while the concrete starts to set (about 4 minutes). Repeat for the other post and leave to set. It will set in 15 minutes but leave it a further 3 hours before resuming work.

Blitz Tipz: Try not to disturb fresh concrete until it has cured. Fast setting concrete is best left overnight but with care you can start working around it within 3 hours.

Step 3 Measure the distance between the posts and cut 2 cross beams (100x50mm) to this length. Nail one in position at ground level and the other at the desired height of the gate (in our case 2.1m) using a spirit level to ensure they are perfectly horizontal. Paint the frame with the bitumen coating.

Step 4 Cut the timber (50x50mm) for the gate. At each end of the upright beams drill two 5mm holes diagonally offset from each other and counter sink them to a depth of 10mm. Butt the end of a cross beam into the upright and screw into position. Repeat for the remaining 3 joints.

Step 5 Drill two 3mm holes through the frame on each side of the corners to thread the brace wire through (see diagram), thread a length of wire through the holes in one corner and tie it off, to the other end attach a shackle and tie it off. Do the same in the opposite corner attaching to the same shackle. Repeat this procedure along the other diagonal and sequentially tighten the shackles until the wires are evenly tensioned and the frame is securely braced. Paint the gate with the bitumen coating (Gripset). **Blitz Tipz:** To make the wire fit snugly against the frame where it loops around the outside, tap it down with a hammer.

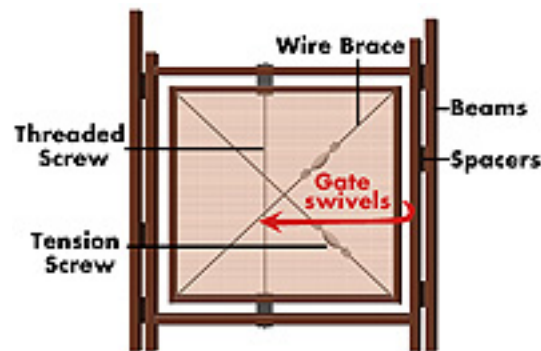


Step 6 Locate the gate in the frame ensuring a 10mm gap on each side. Mark the points where the pivot rod will pass through the frame and the gate, and drill a hole the same diameter as the threaded rod you are using. We drilled our holes 300mm to the left of centre to maximise the space we had available.

Blitz Tipz: Do not locate your pivot point too far from centre as this will place excessive stress on your gate and frame.

Step 7 Locate the pivot rod using 4 washers as spacers between the gate and the frame both top and bottom. Use nuts and washers on the insides of the gate and the outsides of the frame (see diagram).

Step 8 Secure the Natureed cladding into position by tying it to the cross bracing with tie wire.



Saloon gates

The front of the garden was separated from the bonsai room with a bamboo wall and two Natureed-clad saloon gates. The construction of the gates is exactly the same as for the pivot gate however they were hinged to the gate posts and latched in the middle. Again the heights of the posts were irregular and uneven in keeping with our Japanese look (see diagram). The bamboo walls were not capped.

Step 1 Mark out the position of the fence and gate posts, excavate their holes, cut the posts (100x50mm) to length, concrete them into position and allow to set (see 'Pivot gate'

Step 2 above for how to do it).

Step 2 Cut the 6 cross rails (100x50mm) which extend between the gate posts and the adjoining fence posts. In keeping with our style space them irregularly and unevenly and nail into position using a spirit level to ensure they are horizontal. Paint the bitumen coating onto the fence and gate posts.

Step 3 Measure out the timber (50x50mm) for the two saloon gates and construct them (see 'Pivot gate' **Steps 4** and **5** above for how to do it).

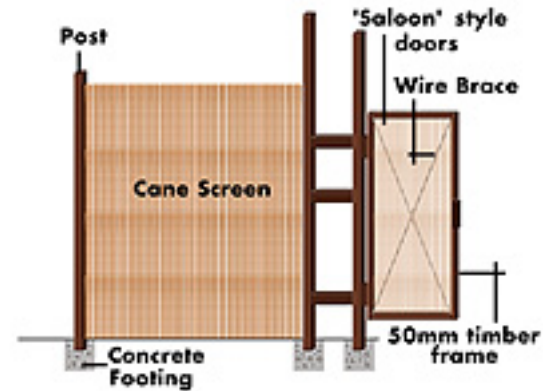
Step 4 To make the latch cut two 100mm lengths of timber (50x50mm) and drill a 20mm hole through the middle of each. Nail them into position on the front inner sides of the gates with the holes lining up. Paint the bitumen coating onto the gates.

Blitz Tipz: You may wish to bevel the corners of the latch to give a smoother appearance.

Step 5 Tie the Natureed cladding into place using tie wire then attach the gates to the posts with 2 hinges per gate. Cut a length of 20mm dowel (file down slightly if necessary) as a bolt for the latch and paint.

Blitz Tipz: Attach the hinges to the gate first.

Step 6 Attach the cladding support wires to the fence and fasten the cladding (see 'Cane wall cladding' **Step 1** to **4** above).



Fern reed cladding

Decorative screens

We made 3 screens, two were used to screen the hot water system and another hung on the wall as a decorative panel. Each was covered with a compressed fibre sheet with a Japanese inspired design. The screens are not weight bearing so no bracing was required. In keeping with the design the hanging frame uprights and cross beams were of irregular lengths (see photo).

Step 1 Cut the timber for the screen frames, nail together, paint with bitumen coating and allow to dry. Also seal the decorative panel with a sealer or lacquer to make it weatherproof.

Step 2 Apply construction adhesive to the facing side of the frame and lay the compressed abaca fibre screen into position. Wrap it around the frame, trim if necessary and staple on the rear side.

Step 3 Position the screens. The screens for the hot water system were joined with hinges and one was screwed into the wall. The hanging screen was screwed into the wall.



Paving and stepping stones

Two layers of paving were used over the entire garden. The top layer was crushed white quartz. To keep it clean, a layer of decomposed granite was used as a sub base separating it from the soil below. None of the layers were compacted as this would reduce the permeability, possibly giving rise to flooding problems and reducing the flow of rain water to the plants. Polished granite stepping stones were also used.

Step 1 Remove any foliage or debris. Level or contour as desired. Locate landscape features (eg rocks) and complete the planting (see garden beds below).

Step 2 Spread a 50mm layer of decomposed granite over the garden and level.

Step 3 To position the stepping stones, prepare a mortar mix in a wheelbarrow (4:1 ratio of brickie's sand and cement). Level the bed for the stepping stone, cover with a 20mm layer of mortar and position the stone. Repeat for each.

Step 4 Spread a 50mm layer of crushed quartz over the decomposed granite. Level and rake.

Blitz Tipz: To space out the stepping stones make them a comfortable distance for walking.



Garden seat

A simple seat was constructed out of three pieces of 350x50mm timber. To ensure stability the joints were housed out so the legs extended three quarters of the way across the width of the seat. When designing your seat decide how high and wide you would like it.

Step 1 Cut two lengths of timber (350x50mm) for the legs and one for the seat.

Step 2 The joints should be 75mm in from the outside edges of the seat and 75mm down from the top of the legs. Mark them out, cut with a circular saw and use a hammer to knock the centre piece out. Assemble the seat, and paint.

Garden beds

We mixed a good quality garden compost (BioGrow) with the existing soil. Plant the garden keeping plants at the same depth as they were in their containers. Water thoroughly.

Our plants

Indian hawthorn (*Rhaphiolepis x delacourii*), lily-of-the-valley shrub (*Pieris japonica*), senkaki maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku'), creeping juniper (*Juniperus taxifolia* var. *luchuensis*), azaleas ('Maves'), baby's tears or helxine (*Soleirolia soleirolii*), *Camellia* 'Bonanza' (bonsai). **Note:** These plants all have their origins in Japan and South East Asia in keeping with the theme of the garden.



Indian hawthorn



lily-of-the-valley shrub



senkaki maple



creeping juniper



azalea 'Maves'



baby's tears

Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. Our total cost of plants and materials was \$8549. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants (\$5702).

- 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.
- Granite off-cuts were from Marble and Granite Art at Blacktown NSW, (02) 9831 1551 or visit the website: www.mgart.com.au. For marble and granite suppliers in other areas look under 'Marble & Granite' in your Yellow Pages.
- Artificial rocks are available from landscape suppliers. Our 'rock' was from Universal Rocks, Peakhurst NSW, (phone (02) 9533 7400, website: www.universalrocks.com.au).
- Japanese-styled compressed abaca fibre screens (Renaturit), fern reed (Natureed), cane reed and bamboo were from House of Bamboo (phone (02) 9666 5703 or www.bambuzit.com.au) or look under 'Cane and Bamboo Products' in your Yellow Pages.
- Gripset is a water based all purpose bitumen compound which we diluted it 3:1 with water and painted on to give the finish we wanted. It's manufactured by Gripcore Aust Pty Ltd and is available from hardware stores.
- The post hole shovel, nail gun and most of the other tools required are available for hire.

Acknowledgements

Construction by the Blitz team.

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