

BACKYARD BLITZ

Spanish Influence

It's not often that we're asked to do a makeover for someone's mother-in-law but that's exactly why Scott Roberts wrote to us. His mother-in-law, Judith Gavan, suffers from rheumatoid arthritis which makes the use of her hands both difficult and painful. Scott asked us to surprise Judith with a beautiful, low-maintenance garden which she could easily look after. With Scott's help we sent Judith and a friend to her sister's for couple of days, giving us time to create a garden with a distinct Spanish influence.



Garden designer Colin Brown's plan was for a low-maintenance garden reminiscent of the outdoor entertainment area of a Spanish hacienda. It has beautiful Spanish columns and an overhead pergola and a planting of bush calamondins (similar to cumquats) in urns, arum lilies and wallmounted terracotta pots of kalanchoe. The focal point is a Spanish fountain with hand painted tiles. The garden also has a fully automatic watering system (even to the pots) so Judith doesn't have to lift a finger.

What we did

We tidied up the existing garden beds - removing some plants and pruning others. A demolition saw was used to cut into the existing paving, making way for the larger garden beds, the column footings and a contrasting border of pavers. Paving borders were laid around the new garden beds and the pergola. The pergola columns were concreted in, roof beams added and three decorative perforated metal screens were built and mounted around the sides. A fountain was installed as was the automatic irrigation system. Terracotta pots were mounted around the walls, urns were positioned and the revamped garden beds were planted out.

Materials

Paving borders: concrete pavers 390x190x50mm (Bowral Bricks 'Maple'), brickie's sand, cement and grouting sand. *Tools:* demolition saw (alternatively use a brick saw), concrete float, spade, brickie's trowel, wheelbarrow, straight edge, string line, marker pen, crow bar and broom.

Pergola and screens: pre-cast cement column (Jacobean barley twist design, sandstone coloured 152x2100mm), hyspan laminated beam (LVH3 200x63mm ordered to the required length) with L-shaped bracket and galvanised screws, treated pine timber slats (30x30x2700mm), 25x75mm framing timber, zinc coated perforated sheets (2000x1000mm), A1 waterproof plywood sheets (2400x1200x7mm), reconstituted sandstone rosette, concrete (40kg bags), brickie's sand, cement, sandstone coloured cement stain, rawl plug (green plug) and 8 gauge screw, galvanised nails, Murowash outdoor acrylic paint ('Red Earth' and 'Arnhem'). *Tools:* wheelbarrow, post hole shovel, spade, demolition saw (or brick saw), string line, 300mm peg, spirit level, ruler, marker pen, bucket, concrete float, brickie's trowel, paintbrush, paint stirrer, jig saw, tin snips, screwdrivers, drill, 7mm and 6mm drill bits, ladder and nail gun (or hammer).

Fountain: fountain (Jardineras tiled water font with side planters), low voltage fountain pump with transformer, low voltage pond light with transformer, low voltage cable, 13mm reinforced hose, hose clips, gel cap connectors, conduit and elbows (20mm), conduit adhesive, brickie's sand, cement, star pickets (optional), galvanised wire (optional). *Tools:* electrical screwdriver and pliers, shovel and spirit level, bucket or hose, lump hammer, brickie's trowel, wheelbarrow, bucket, spirit level and spade.

Mounted containers and urns: 200mm diameter terracotta pots, wall mounting brackets, rawl plugs (green) and screws (8 gauge), urns (Enduca Pot 600mm diameter x 75mm high), potting mix and paint (Murowash 'Red Earth'). *Tools:* drill and 7mm bit, marker pen, screwdriver, rag or sponge and bucket.

Plants: (see list below), potting mix and horticultural bark mulch. *Tools:* spade.

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. If your site requires 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.

Paving

Some of the existing paving was removed to make new garden beds. We also replaced some of the existing paving with dark coloured pavers to make a border around the edges of the pergola and the garden beds. A demolition saw was used to cut the existing paving.

Blitz Tipz: A demolition saw is potentially dangerous in the hands of an inexperienced person. A safer option is a brick saw. If using a brick saw mark the bricks to be cut, remove them, make the cut and return them to their original position.



Step 1 Mark the line to be cut in the existing paving using a marker pen and straight edge. When marking out, take the depth of the new border into consideration when marking out the garden beds.

Blitz Tipz: A perfectly straight piece of timber can be used as a straight edge. If your planned cut is several metres long it will pay to set up a string line first to guide the placement of the straight edge as you mark it out.

Step 2 Use a demolition saw to cut along the marked lines, remove the unwanted pavers and excavate a 50mm bed under the area of the new border.

Blitz Tipz: Wear full safety gear and make sure that bystanders and pets are kept well away as this is a very dusty operation.

Step 3 Spread a 50mm layer of mortar (4:1 ratio of sand and cement) where the new border is to be laid. Use a concrete float to ensure it is smooth and level. Lay the border pavers ensuring they are at the same height as the existing paving. When paving around corners and angles you will need to use a brick saw to mitre cut the bricks to fit in. Leave the new paving to set overnight.

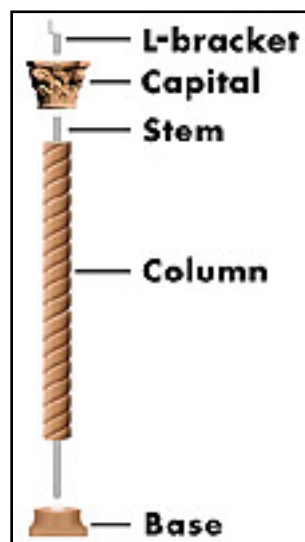
Blitz Tipz: Use the handle of the trowel or a rubber mallet to tamp the pavers down into position.

Step 4 To grout, spread grouting sand over the paving and sweep in with a broom to fill the gaps.

Blitz Tipz: To ensure the grouting sand is perfectly dry spread it in a thin layer over the paving and allow to bake in the sun for a couple of hours before sweeping it in.

Pergola

We built a pergola in the centre of the existing paved courtyard using pre-cast concrete columns, L3 beams and treated pine 30x30mm slats on the roof. Four sections of paving were removed to make room for the column footings. Mondo grass borders were planted around the columns. The columns we used come in four pieces: the base, the column shaft, the capital and the top bracket (see diagram). The central shaft of the column extended about 400mm below the level of the base so it could be concreted securely into position. It is important to work out the levels at the start and build the footings accordingly.



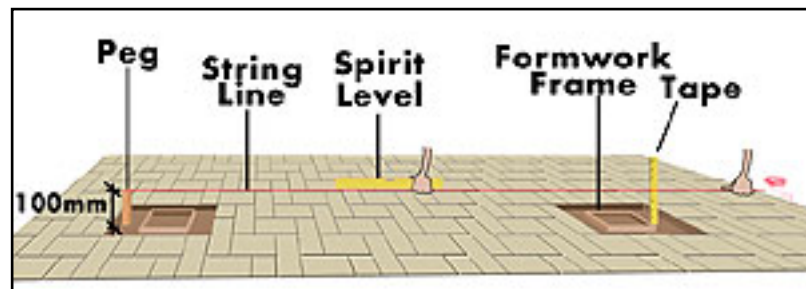


Step 1 Mark out the position of the footings and cut the existing paving with a demolition saw. Remove the unwanted paving then lift the pavers bordering the hole, lay a 50mm mortar bed and return the pavers to their original position. Allow to set overnight. **BlitzTipz:** If you are using a brick saw instead of a demolition saw, lift the unwanted pavers and mark those to be cut to shape. Remove and cut the pavers with the brick saw and they are ready for being put back into position.

Step 2 Excavate a hole for the footing to a depth of 600mm and about the same dimensions as the column base. Using 75x25mm timber make a form work frame to the same dimensions as the outside of the column base. Place the form work in position over the hole.

Step 3 To keep the tops of the columns levels you need to have the relative heights of the form work frames level from the beginning. Do this using a string line, spirit level and tape measure (see Blitz Tipz below). Adjust, the heights/depths of the frames until they are all at the same level.

Blitz Tipz: Drive a peg into the ground near one of the form work frames. Run a string line to another form work frame, using a helper or another peg to hold it taut. Check that it is level (use a spirit level for this) then measure the distance from the string to the top of the form work frame. Move to one of the other holes, level the string line (using a spirit level) and measure the distance to the top of the form work frame. If the measurement is not the same as the first hole, adjust the frame until it is.



Repeat for each of the holes adjusting the frames up or down until they are all the same level as the first one (checking with a spirit level). If the form work is level, the tops of the columns will all be level.

Step 4 Prepare a batch of concrete (as per the manufacturer's instructions), fill the holes to the top of the form work frames and smooth with a concrete float.

Step 5 Work quickly as you can before the concrete sets to prepare a mortar mix (4:1 ratio of sand and cement and include a sandstone coloured stain) and spread a 10mm layer over the top of the concrete.

Blitz Tipz: Ensure you use the same amount of mortar when constructing each column in order to keep the levels even.

Place the column base in position, spread a 10mm layer of mortar over the top of the base and, with

the assistance of a helper, lower the column into position passing the stem through the hole in the base and into the setting concrete. Use a spirit level to ensure it is perfectly upright. Allow to set for 48 hours before resuming work on the column.

Blitz Tipz: Do not leave the concrete more than an hour before inserting the stem of the column or the concrete will set too hard to work with.

Step 6 Lower the capital into position with a 10mm mortar bed between it and the column. Lower the L-bracket into position and fill the top of the capital with mortar until it is flush with the top. Ensure the L-brackets are positioned so they will be on the inward facing sides of the beams. Allow to set overnight.

Step 7 Pre-paint the roof beams and slats. Fix and position the roof beams by screwing them to the L-brackets and then nail the slats onto the beams. Nail the two end slats first after checking they are square to the beams and that they overhang each side evenly. On one side run a string line between the ends of the end slats to guide the placement of the middle slats. To ensure the gap between the slats remains even use a spare slat as a spacing block. Sit the spacing block between the last slat you nailed and the one you are about to nail. Press them firmly together and nail. After every five slats use a tape measure to double check that the slats are square and make adjustments as necessary. Before you nail the last five slats sit them in position and check to see if the last one will fit, if not evenly space them so it will.

Blitz Tipz: A nail gun makes this job much easier allowing you to hold the slats with one hand and nail with the other.

Finishing touches: We planted mondo grass around the base of the columns to soften the look.

Screens

We built three screens out of zinc coated perforated metal and plywood. Two of the screens were at one end of the garden and one was at the other (see the plan at the top of this page). They were mounted between the same type of columns we used in the pergola. A laminated beam ran along the top of the them and was also the same type as used in the pergola. If planning screens in your makeover, design the column widths to accommodate them.

Step 1 Mark out the position of the columns, cut the paving, establish the levels, pour the footings, position the column bases, locate the columns, capitals and L-brackets, and screw the beam into position using **Steps 1 - 7** in the 'Pergola' instructions above (omitting the slats).

Step 2 Mark out the shape of the screen borders on two plywood sheets and cut them out with a jig saw. Mark out the shape of the screen on a sheet of perforated metal and cut out with tin snips.

Step 3 Sandwich the metal between the plywood borders, drill 10x6mm holes (4 down either side, 1 at the top and 1 at the bottom). Locate an L-bracket (30x30mm) between the plywood sheets, one in each of the four corners. Bolt the assembly together with 6mm cup head bolts and nuts.



Step 4 Mark a circle in the centre of the screen and cut it out with tin snips. Make a plywood border for the circle, assemble, drill four evenly spaced holes and bolt together.

Step 5 Mount the screens at the planned height by drilling holes in the columns for the rawl plug (green plug) and screwing the L-brackets into them.

Finishing touches: Paint the screens and screen borders. As a feature, mount a reconstituted sandstone 'rosette' behind the single screen at one end of the garden so it is visible through the hole.



Fountain

We used an imported Spanish fountain with a tiled splashback behind the fountain head and a planter on each side of the bowl. It came in six pieces and had to be assembled. When assembling it we had to adapt it to a free standing position - it is designed to be mounted against a solid wall so we improvised with star pickets and used galvanised wire to support the splashback and wings while we mortared it together.



It also came with a special plug that incorporated a hole for the low voltage cables. If your fountain does not come with a cable hole you will need to drill one and after threading the cables through seal it with sikaflex 11FC (allowing it to cure for 12 hours).

Step 1 Mark out the location of the fountain and excavate a 75mm bed. Spread a dry 75mm layer of brickie's sand and cement (in a 4:1 ratio) in the bed and screed. Use a spirit level to ensure it is perfectly horizontal.

Step 2 Mount the transformers for the low voltage fountain pump and low voltage pond lamp near an existing electrical outlet. Excavate a trench for the conduit from the location of the transformers to the location of the water feature and lay the conduit, cutting to length, inserting elbows where necessary and threading the cables through as you go. Fill in the trench and replace any turf or earth disturbed in the process.

Blitz Tip: Wiggling the conduit as you push the cables through makes the job much easier.

Step 3 Locate the fountain pump and light in the base of the fountain, thread the cable through the hole in the plug and out through the hole in the bottom of the base. Connect the fountain feed hose to the spout with a hose clip.

Step 4 Put the base of the fountain and the planters in position with the cables extending from the back of the base. If you are mounting it against a solid wall, use the mounting attachments on the back of the splashback and wings and do not mortar. If mounting it free-standing drive four star pickets into the ground immediately behind the fountain base to form a support for the splashback and one on each side to support the wings.

Blitz Tip: Be careful not to drive a star picket through the newly laid conduit.

Step 5 Attach galvanised wire to the star pickets and position the splashback after placing a 10mm layer of mortar (4:1 ratio of brickie's sand and cement with a cement stain to match the fountain)

along the top of the fountain base. Allow to set overnight. Ensure the fountain supply hose is threaded through to the bottom of the fountain bowl as you assemble it. Mount the wings and mortar them to the planters.

Step 6 Connect the fountain supply hose to the pump outlet with a hose clip and fill the bowl with water. Connect a low voltage cable to the pump cable and one to the light cable using gel cap connectors and connect them to the transformers at the other end. Test the fountain and light. Plant the planters (see garden beds below).

Automatic irrigation system

We installed a fully automatic irrigation system. When selecting a system for your garden seek the advice of a specialist to help tailor it to your specific requirements (take your garden plan with you to an irrigation specialist).

We used an Orbit timer which is battery powered to control the system. A 19mm polypipe supplies 4mm spaghetti lines with adjustable drippers on the ends.

Blitz Tip: We used and recommend using a back flow valve between your tap and watering system (available from your irrigation supplier). It prevents water flowing back from your irrigation system into the household supply.



Urns and mounted containers

We positioned Spanish urns in the garden and mounted several 200mm diameter terracotta pots on the wall using a simple bracket fitting (available from garden centres or hardware stores).

Blitz Tip: When planning to mount containers or hang baskets give consideration to the size the plant will grow to and how heavy it will be - especially after being watered. The mounting attachment must be able to support this weight.

Mounting containers

Step 1 Position the bracket on the wall and check by eye that it is level by using a brick course as a bench mark. Mark the position of the screw holes on the wall, remove the bracket, drill 7mm holes then screw the bracket into position using a rawl plug (green plug) and screw.

Blitz Tip: If you are mounting several containers use a brick course (a row of bricks) as a guide to keeping them at the same height.

Step 2 Plant the terracotta pot using a good quality potting mix and keep the plant at the same level it was in its original container. Water and allow to sit while the excess water drains away.

Step 3 Place the container in the bracket and arrange the foliage for maximum effect.

Finishing touches: We 'ragged' (painted with heavily watered down paint using a rag or sponge) our terracotta pots and urns using the same colour ('Red Earth') as was used elsewhere in the garden. After ragging the pots and urns allow them to dry before planting.



Garden beds

Our garden beds were planted out ensuring the plants were kept at the same depth as they were in their containers. We mulched by spreading a 50mm layer of organic mulch (we used horticultural bark) over the garden beds and then watered.

Our plants

Kalanchoe (*Kalanchoe* 'Mission Bells'), dwarf sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica* 'Nana'), gold pencil pines (*Cupressus sempervirens* 'Swane's Golden'), calamondin (*Citrus mitis*), mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), arum lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*), dwarf arum lily (*Z. aethiopica* var. *childsiana*), cycad (*Cycas revoluta*).



kalanchoe



dwarf
sacred
bamboo



gold pencil
pines



calamondin



mondo
grass



arum lillies



cycad

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 \$12,938 . Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants (\$8533).

- Plants are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order plants for you.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building suppliers, or landscape suppliers.
- 'Maple' pavers from Bowral Bricks, (02) 9633 9922.
- Zinc covered perforated sheeting from Metal Mesh, Blacktown, (02) 9486 3900.
- Jacobean barley twist columns (supplied with an L-shaped bracket) were made to order by L & M Winter (02) 9905 9197 or check your Yellow Pages under 'Concrete Products
- The concrete rosette was supplied by Cement Mouldings, Sydney and is available from the following garden centres in Sydney:
 - Parker's Nursery, Turramurra, (02) 9487 3888.
 - The Parterre Garden, Woollahra, (02) 9363 5874.
 - Michele Shennen Garden Centre, Willoughby, (02) 9958 6631.
 - Patio Garden Design, North Sydney, (02) 9955 5612.
 - Bay Street Nurseries, Double Bay, (02) 9327 3936.
 - Impressions Outdoor Furniture, Heating and Barbeques, Castle Hill, (02) 9899 5822.

For similar products check your Yellow Pages under 'Concrete Products

- Murowash paints from Murobond Coatings are available nationally (check you local phone book

or phone (02) 9906 7299).

- Hozelock 100s low voltage pond pump and pond light - look under 'Fountains' in your Yellow Pages.
- Hyspan treated pine laminated beam (LVL H3 200x63mm) supplied by Midcoast Timber (02) 9521-8611 or look under 'Timber Treatments and Preservation' in your Yellow Pages.
- Jardineras Tiled Water Font with side planters (Model 1820) and Enduca Pot (Model 454), eastern states call Ponds and Pumps (03) 9764 1775; WA call Hugall and Hoile 13 20 09.
- The vibrating plate compactor, demolition saw, post hole shovel, safety gear and most of the other tools required are available for hire.

