

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## Concrete to Classic



Bill and Tina Psarakis have lovingly restored a Victorian home and as with most renovations, the garden has been left until the end. The backyard could become a private family retreat but it will need some serious effort from the Blitz team to realise its potential. While we got to work, we sent Bill, Tina and their children Arthur and Ellen on a coastal getaway to Nelson Bay on the mid-north coast of NSW.

Landscape designer Matthew Cantwell from Secret Gardens of Sydney has created a private courtyard garden. An outdoor room has been created with the construction of a covered deck area at the rear of the house. Its blue and white striped roof was inspired by the Greek flag to reflect the owners Greek heritage. A central lawn is surrounded by brick paths from the house to the garage. A large feature tree was incorporated into the middle of the lawn area and seats made of lightweight Hebel concrete blocks were placed amid a gravel mulch around the trunk.



The garden is screened on two sides with fast growing conifers. Half wine barrels planted with lemons added to the Mediterranean feel of the garden.

### 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 to remove some trees, and may be required for some structural work. Check with your local council regarding access and delivery and storage of materials during the construction of your garden. All public areas should be kept clean and safe following the delivery and use of landscape materials.

## Materials

**Pergola and decking:** a combination of materials was used to give the pergola a feeling of solidity and to continue the Mediterranean theme of the garden. All timbers used were preservative treated structural grade timber. All fittings and connecting materials were galvanised. Posts were installed in ground using rapidset concrete. The following timber sizes were used; posts (90x90mm and 175mm round logs), ledger attached to house using dynabolts (90x45mm), bearers (140x70mm), joists (90x45mm), fascia (190x35mm), decking boards (90x20mm), handrail (90x35mm), timber steps (190x45mm stringers and treads). A custom-made canvas shade sail was connected to the posts and house using galvanised eyebolts, turnbuckles and screws. **Blitz Tipz:** Draw a scale plan of your deck and take it to your timber supplier or hardware store for assistance with selecting timber sizes and lengths.



### Decking

**Paving:** the existing concrete pavers were lifted and brushed clean. They were then relaid upside down to reveal the clean bottom face. As a concrete slab already existed beneath the old pavers, pavers were laid straight over paving sand on the slab. Fine grouting sand was then swept through the pavers to bond them together and a mortar haunch was laid beneath the edge pavers to hold it all in place. All brick cutting was done using a bricksaw. **Blitz Tipz:** To give old concrete pavers new vigour, clean them by scrubbing with a coarse brush and a weak solution of water and hydrochloric acid. Strong rubber gloves and eye protection are essential when using this technique.

**Garden beds:** an organic garden mix was incorporated with the site soil to improve drainage and nutrient qualities. A horticultural grade pine bark was laid 100mm deep as a mulch to help retain soil moisture and suppress weed growth. To keep the lawn from entering the garden beds a paver edge was laid over compacted roadbase and a mortar haunch held it in place.

**Lawn:** the concrete slab beneath some of the existing pavers was removed to make way for an area of lawn. Turf underlay was spread to about 100mm thick. Soft-leaf buffalo was laid, rolled into place and well watered. **Blitz Tipz:** A lawn leveller or length of timber fastened to the back face of a nail rake will make preparing your lawn area quicker and easier.

**Hebel seats:** Hebel blocks (600x200x200mm) were joined using construction adhesive to create a square seat. Tiles (60x60mm) were connected with tile adhesive in a diamond pattern and grouted. The seats were bagged with a 3:1 mortar mix and set in place on a pad of mortar. **Blitz Tipz:** Hebel is a soft material and can be easily shaped using a rasp file.

**Pots:** a large reconstituted sandstone trough (1000x420x360mm) housed two conifers and three half wine barrels (1000mm diameter) contained lemon trees. Both types of containers had drainage holes and were filled with a top quality potting mix.



### Hebel seats

## Plants

The design creates a semi-formal courtyard by combining evergreen hedges, summer flowering shrubs and perennials and a large deciduous feature tree.

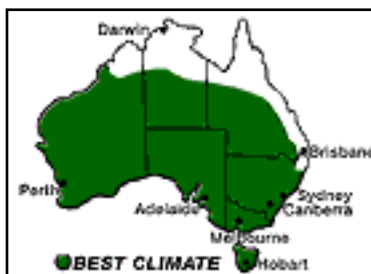
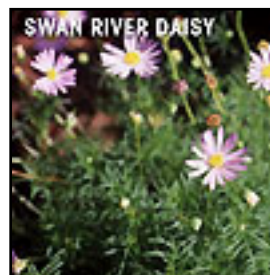
**Feature tree:** Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)

**Screen plantings:** NZ Christmas tree (*Meterosideros excelsus*), Leyland cypress (*Cupressocyparis leylandii* 'Leighton Green')

**Border plants:** agapanthus (*Agapanthus praecox*), swan river daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*), gardenia (*Gardenia augusta* 'Magnifica'), Italian lavender (*Lavandula stoechas* 'Winter Purple')

**Potted plants:** lemon (*Citrus limon* 'Meyer'), spartan juniper (*Juniperus virginiana* 'Spartan')

**Lawn:** soft-leaf buffalo ('Sir Walter')



## Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. As a result our total cost of plants and materials was \$9489. This cost could be reduced to \$7457 by using smaller plants.

- The 400 litre feature tree was from Civic Trees in Sydney, phone: (02) 9651 2833. This tree was 5m tall by 5m wide, weighed about 750kg and cost \$2000. It was moved into position with a truck mounted hydraulic hoist.
- The large reconstituted sandstone trough (1000x420x360mm) was from Elegant Garden World; phone: (02) 9723 1088.
- The canvas awning covering the deck area was custom made by Agrifab in Sydney and cost \$550; phone (02) 9736 2777.
- The CSR Hebel blocks used to create block seats cost about \$8 for a 600x200x200mm block. We used 'Sky Blue' 60x60mm tiles from Amber as a decorative feature. These blocks are available Australia wide at most large hardware stores or contact Amber Central Office in NSW on (02) 9831 7271.
- Large half wine barrels cost about \$100 each and are available from most good nurseries, pot specialists and landscape suppliers.
- Most of the plants we used are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order them for you. You may need to contact specialist nurseries for some plants. Your local nursery should be able to provide contacts.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used such as the 90 pound jackhammer are commonly available for hire.

## Getaway details

Accommodation: Roches Resort, Sandy Point Rd, Salamander Bay, Port Stephens, phone: (02) 4984 1111. Tours: Sand Safari's phone: (02) 4965 0215. Moonshadow Charters (Dolphin Cruise) phone: (02) 4984 9388.

## Acknowledgements:

- Design by Matthew Cantwell, Secret Gardens of Sydney. Phone: (02) 9365 6533
- Construction by the Backyard Blitz team (all gardens are a gift from Backyard Blitz)

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