

PARSLEY BAY GARDEN

Designed and maintained by Pepo Botanic Design, this lush Sydney villa garden is enriched by a collection of bespoke artworks.

WORDS TANVA WOOD PHOTOGRAPHY DIANNA SNAPE



PARSLEY BAY GARDEN
1:400



PARSLEY BAY GARDEN, DESIGNED BY PEPO

Botanic Design, combines art, landscape and built form to achieve a simple goal – a place in which to “live well” in the urban environment of Sydney. The landscape masterplan called for a conscious interplay between the spaces of the garden and the house – all of which were envisaged as being equally habitable – and the line between interior and exterior space was to be blurred. The result is an imaginative demonstration of the way nature can interact with architecture and art.

This is as much an outdoor art gallery as a domestic garden. From the entry gate, a whimsical iron sculpture by Francesco Petrollo frames views through the house to pockets of the Parsley Bay landscape. The garden, the house and the bay combine to provide a setting for an impressive variety of art pieces.

The garden, while carefully planned, appears natural and unstructured. Its wild character is distinguished by a mix of native and exotic vegetation, differing foliage textures and the fact that the landscape has been allowed to encroach on trafficable spaces. Pepo Botanic Design currently maintains the garden, ensuring it remains finely tuned to the needs of the clients. Daringly different from the “cottage garden” aesthetic typical of inner-city villas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the

garden itself is a work of exciting living art.

Interplay between interior and exterior spaces is supported by the use of similar colour palettes for the hard surfaces inside and out. The open plan of the house and its towering glass windows invite the landscape inside and make the most of the beautiful artworks and sculptures in both house and garden.

At the entrance, the planting palette consists of mostly native species, while a small pond in the courtyard sounds a calming note outside the window of the main bedroom.

The rear landscape includes a wide range of plant species, a pool, a chook shed, a compost area and access steps to the reserve below. This is a landscape for living – a landscape to be explored, walked through, worked on and actively used, not just appreciated from afar. Another art element is incorporated here – the fence and gate that section off the chook shed from the upper areas were also crafted by Francesco Petrollo and mimic the sculpture on the pergola at the entrance. The vast array of plant material is a step away from the cottage garden aesthetic and seems to be more in keeping with a casual modernist formalism.

The built form by Molnar Freeman Architects is a clever interpretation of the site. Its art-adorned walls, broad steps and neat, clean lines reflect the nature of the clients; >

O1 LUSH TROPICAL PLANTINGS AT THE REAR OF THE GARDEN ARE REFLECTED ON THE POOL'S SURFACE.

O2 PEERING THROUGH THE FRONT GATE DESIGNED BY FRANCESCO PETROLLO.

O3 THE LIVING SPACES AT THE BACK OF THE HOUSE OPEN UP TO THE POOL AND CATCH GLIMPSES OF THE BAY BEYOND.

O4 SWEEPING STONE PAVERS ARE SURROUNDED BY KIDNEY WEED (*DICHOONDRA REPENS*).

O5 THE BALCONY GARDEN WITH OUTDOOR LOUNGES AND PLANTER BOXES.

PROJECT
PARSLEY BAY GARDEN
SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES

PRACTICE
PEPO BOTANIC DESIGN

PROJECT TEAM
NICOLA CAMERON, CAROLINE ARMSTRONG, JAMES PERKIN

ARCHITECT
MOLNAR FREEMAN ARCHITECTS

BLACKSMITH
FRANCESCO PETROLLO

BUILDER
TRADE A MANAGEMENT

TIME SCHEDULE
DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION:
1 MONTH
CONSTRUCTION: 6 MONTHS



O2



O3



O4



O5



06



07



08

the house is capacious yet placid. The landscape designer's intent was to "mess up" the architecture of the house, to provide a defined juxtaposition, and the garden is deliberately contrasted with the house through unstructured pockets of planting, un-manicured mass plantings and plantings that creep out or overhang the access paths.

The site's landscape extends down to Parsley Bay, a hidden treasure at the bottom of the garden. Set aside for public recreation in 1907, Parsley Bay is a local secret. The rock shelves and platforms that frame the bay edge, the area for active play and the public pedestrian bridge arching over the bay itself are all hidden from the garden. It is not until you wander past the chook shed and through the cool canopy cover that you gain a clear understanding of how close the bay actually is. This use of borrowed scenery is quite a surprise, as many courtyard gardens of urban villas not only celebrate all possible views, they demand them in an almost greedy competition between properties.

The very fact that the landscape has been allowed to take precedence over the view is a testament to the clients, who see the landscape as an extension of their art passion and have encouraged its treatment as an art form in itself.

Parsley Bay Garden is a triumph of creative play in its combination of art, landscape and built form. With art as the driving factor, the landscape wraps around the house and immerses the visitor in a separated world, albeit in a high-density residential area. The landscape is given priority and it is this nod to an imagined original version of the area, before colonization and our obsession with views, that makes the project such a successful design.

06 IN THE REAR GARDEN
TIMBER STEPS LEAD TO
THE RESERVE BELOW.

07 CHOOKS ROAM FREE
IN THE REAR GARDEN.

08 THE RESIDENT CAT IS
PERCHED ON A SANDSTONE
RETAINING WALL.

09 THE POOL IS BUILT
ALMOST FLUSH AGAINST
THE REAR OF THE HOUSE.



09

NICOLA CAMERON PEPO BOTANIC DESIGN

Nicola Cameron is the director of Pepo Botanic Design – a team of visual artists, landscape architects and horticulturists who specialize in garden design, construction and maintenance.



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AUSTRALIA: WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF DOMESTIC GARDEN PROJECTS THAT ATTRACT YOU TO THIS KIND OF WORK?

Nicola Cameron: For residential projects it is essential to have an in-depth understanding of the client's family – to know their tastes and idiosyncrasies and create a space that can respond to their needs and lifestyle. As designers, we are given a unique opportunity to connect with those who will directly benefit from the garden space and create a garden that is tailored to them.

The home is a sacred place for most people, a place where they want to relax and enjoy the company of friends and family or to have time to themselves. There is an intimacy about these spaces and it is important to understand how the family wants to feel in them. Briefs are often based around clients' ideals, such as, "I want a place to be able to read" or "I would like to be able to grow food to eat." Fulfilling their goals is an exciting process that can transform our clients' lifestyles and be incredibly rewarding for us.

There is the added challenge in urban gardens of making the most of every centimetre, maximizing the impact of the garden and its connections to the house. Planting design is

very important to create the perfect balance and microclimate in such spaces.

We at Pepo Botanic Design also benefit from being involved not only in designing gardens but in building them. Our hands are often, quite literally, in the earth, which creates a strong sense of connection and responsibility for our practice and our art. Pepo has a garden maintenance arm, which allows us to see how our gardens grow and to develop them as they do. This is a malleable process that acknowledges the ever-changing nature of gardens, enabling us to be part of that change. We can experiment with our ideas through time, which in turn nurtures our own professional development.

In our projects we collaborate with like-minded architects, artists and craftspeople who understand our ethos, which enriches the design process and the project outcome.

Domestic garden projects can be quicker than public projects such as parks because the decision-making process is usually simpler and clients are often keen to start as soon as they approach you.

We believe that individual gardens are the microcosm of the landscape at large and we enjoy the idea that we are creating something that has the potential to inspire and connect people with that wider landscape.

LAA: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE SITE IN INFORMING YOUR DESIGN CONCEPT AND WHY?

NC: We feel that understanding the site is essential in forming the design concept for the garden. We always visit the site to understand its microclimate, setting and history, getting to understand each square metre in relationship to the suburb and city. It is essential in forming the planting style and overall garden aesthetic. The site also informs the sculpture and artistic detail that give each garden its unique character. We often find that the site can tell us a lot about the client: why they chose to live in that particular place, their values and their interests. Over the years we have seen our clients move houses and change lifestyles and we try to respond to this in our design process.

LAA: DO YOU HAVE A VIEW ON THE ROLE OF ART, CRAFT, FUNCTION AND THE PROSAIC, EVEN MUNDANE, IN THESE GARDENS? AND IF SO, HOW ARE THESE EXPRESSED?

NC: Sometimes, sculpture or a bespoke design detail is the answer to a spatial conundrum. It can be this that provides the garden with its "poetic power," to make it a meaningful space, perhaps something that the client could not imagine themselves. >

10 PEPO DESIGNERS AT WORK
IN THEIR SOUTH COOGEE
STUDIO. PHOTOGRAPHY:
COURTESY OF PEPO
BOTANIC DESIGN.



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For example, incorporating a common clothesline into a smaller courtyard space can be challenging. The answer might be, however, to think about that clothesline as sculpture and ask whether, when it isn't being used to dry clothes, it can nestle in and become part of the garden experience. Smaller courtyard spaces can benefit from artistic gestures in the form of materials or details that give a sense of presence and place to the home. We love to challenge obvious solutions by working with artists, fabricators and architects to solve problems and provide solutions that go beyond the designer and client's initial thinking.

Importantly, art, sculpture and design detail can express the personality of the client.

LAA: ARE THERE OBVIOUS PITFALLS TO CARRYING OUT RESIDENTIAL GARDEN WORK AND DO YOU HAVE VIEWS AS TO WHY IT IS NOT DISCUSSED MUCH IN THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PRESS?

NC: It is common for us to be brought into a building project at the end and be presented with leftover space and leftover budget! We know, however, that when we are brought into a project in the early stages, the home becomes an

integrated blend of interior and exterior spaces and provides a better outcome for the client. These are the projects we enjoy the most and find most rewarding, projects where the architecture is enhanced by its garden surrounds and that provides the connection to place and landscape.

LAA: WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE FUTURE FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS IN THIS AREA OF DESIGN IN AUSTRALIA?

NC: Over the last decade or so, the profile of domestic garden design has been raised through a mixture of exposure in the popular media and the development application process, which is required when building a new home or garden in Sydney. There has also been a proliferation of lifestyle magazines that focus on designing homes and gardens that respond to sustainability, architecture and style. This has really helped build a case for creating a complete home and garden that functions as an integrated space.

University education in landscape architecture in Australia undoubtedly has a focus on the public domain and there is limited exposure to the art of plant selection and garden design at a residential scale. In these

formative years, the university system needs to ensure that there is a healthy exposure to both scales of work so that students aren't discouraged from residential work. The skills that university teaches students are complementary to those provided by landscape design programs at TAFE and both are valuable to the art of garden-making.

At the 2013 Australian Landscape Conference in Melbourne, it seemed to me that there was equal recognition for both residential and public domain work by international landscape architects such as Raymond Jungles and Ken Smith.

We hope that the garden-making industry continues to grow and, as it does, to attract those who graduate with a degree in landscape architecture. Their skills are valuable and complement those of horticulturists, artists and architects, pushing the boundaries and continuing to develop the idea of the garden in Australia.