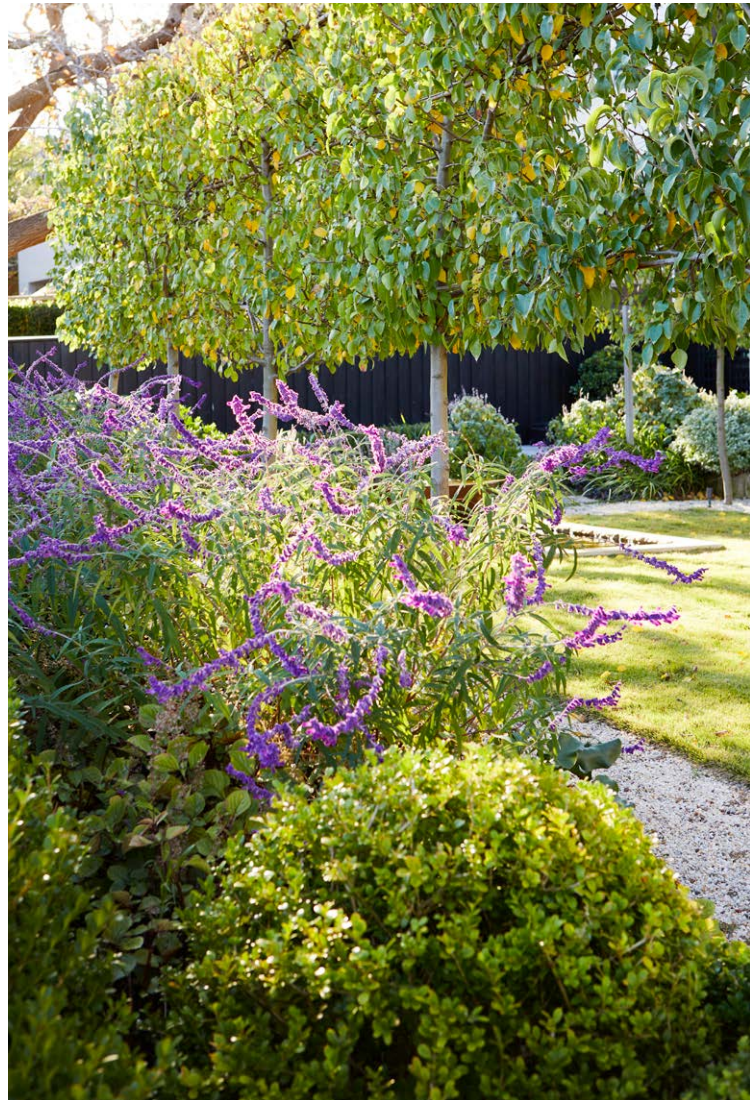
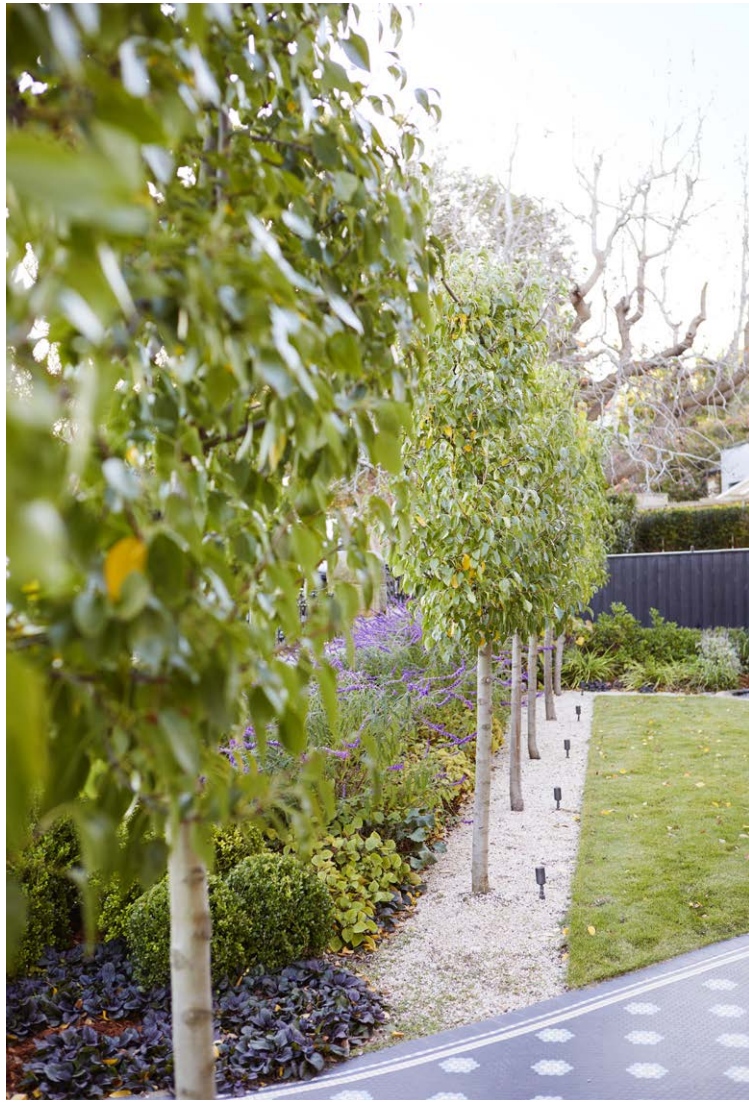


FORMAL ADDRESS

Thanks to new structure and thoughtful plant choice, this stunning manor house now has a garden that's in keeping with its architecture – and it's family-friendly too.

STORY *Tammy Huynh* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Natalie Hunfalvay*

This early 1900s home is enveloped in layers of greenery and bordered by a traditional sandstone-block fence. "It's sensitive to the style of the home and local area," says lead designer Charlie Albone. The existing Chinese elm gives height and grandeur and is complemented by a row of pleached snow pear (*Pyrus nivalis*), neatly trimmed hedges and groups of boxus and bay balls. To counter the formality and introduce seasonal interest, Charlie included a mixed border with swathes of Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*), *Plectranthus argentatus* 'Silver Shield' and sea lavender (*Limonium perezii*).



A low hedge of Japanese box defines the outer edge of the garden bed with neatly clipped balls of *Rhaphiolepis* 'Oriental Pearl' and *Elaeagnus macrophylla* on the inner border; between the two are loose plantings of *Liriope* 'Evergreen Giant' and *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'White Ball'. The mature tree in the corner is an existing Chinese elm. **OPPOSITE TOP LEFT** Pleached snow pears (*Pyrus nivalis*) border the rectangular lawn and are 'mulched' with decorative pea gravel for definition and to create a point of difference. **OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT** Beds of mixed perennials including Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*) and sea lavender (*Limonium perezii*) are punctuated by buxus balls. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** The 'keyhole' water feature is a custom design that adds to the formality of the garden. ▶

A complete home renovation is often the catalyst for a garden redesign. So, when the owners of this magnificent 1900s manor on Sydney Harbour undertook an extensive transformation of the exterior, they decided to call in the experts. The brief to Charlie Albone, lead designer and director of Inspired Exteriors, was “to design a formal garden to provide guests with a stately welcome as they arrived at the property”. The team was also asked to completely overhaul the expansive rear garden, landscaping around the entertaining space of the upper terrace, while the lower garden had to accommodate an open lawn and quarter basketball court for the children.

Charlie took cues from the architecture of the home in designing the front garden, adding well-defined lines to give it structure and prominence. Now, there’s a sense of arrival. Pleached snow pears (*Pyrus nivalis*) provide a strong vertical element, while framing and enclosing the space. “They aid in creating a dramatic, but intimate experience when you step into the garden,” says Charlie. A classic rectangular lawn was laid, and a striking copper-bowl water feature was positioned at the end to help anchor the design. “This unique keyhole-shaped water feature draws interest, while its positioning helps centre and balance the layout,” says Charlie. ▶



The backyard had to be high impact, but low maintenance and robust enough to withstand both westerly sun and children's ball games. Here, clumps of rosemary intermingle with clipped buxus and gardenias. A row of Mexican lily (*Beschorneria yuccoides*) introduces a striking colour contrast. **OPPOSITE** Potted plants are a practical inclusion on the entertaining terrace and don't distract from the view.

To take the edge off the formality, Charlie planted the sandstone-framed garden beds with a loose mix of soft-leaved plantings, punctuated by low hedges and tidy topiary balls. Ornamental grasses and airy flowering perennials like sea lavender (*Limonium perezii*) and Mexican bush sage provide movement and texture, while the tightly pruned Japanese box and bay balls maintain year-round formality. “The planting focused on texture and flowers as these elements are visible from the house and inwards from the street.”

The mixed planting style was carried through to the rear garden and upper terrace. A lilly pilly hedge (*Syzygium* ‘Straight and Narrow’) created the perfect ‘green fence’ along the boundary, while also acting as a privacy screen for the modern entertaining terrace. Here, the planting is minimal but impactful. A low dry-stacked sandstone wall was constructed to draw the eye into the pool area. “Simple stone walls and benches add a sculptural element as well as focal or destination points,” says Charlie.

“A front garden can be purely aesthetic as time spent in it is often less than that spent in a rear garden.” Charlie Albone, landscape designer

Lower down, cloud-pruned junipers and various sized clipped balls continue to highlight the formal theme. “Topiary accents throughout the garden create a sense of repetition and strength, and help to unify the design,” says Charlie. He carefully selected the surrounding plants to withstand full sun and tolerate the impact of children’s ball games. “We focused on creating drifts of predominantly foliage-based plants with varying form, colour and texture.” Clipped buns of *Rhaphiolepis* ‘Oriental Pearl’, buxus and bay mingle with sword-leaved Mexican lily (*Beschorneria yuccoides*) and shrub-like grasses including *Liriope* ‘Evergreen Giant’.

The use of the garden extends into the night with strategically placed lighting. “It is a key feature of the design and ensures both the front and rear gardens come to life after the sun sets,” says Charlie. “Lights set into the gravel at the base of the pleached pears provide a stunning welcome as guests arrive at night.” ▶ *Inspired Exteriors; inspiredexteriors.com.au.*

Topiary accents recur throughout the garden. Stately cloud-pruned junipers flank the stairs to the home’s rear entry and are underplanted with *Crassula* ‘Bluebird’. Clipped balls of *Rhaphiolepis* ‘Oriental Pearl’, bay (*Laurel nobilis*), *Elaeagnus macrophylla* and buxus are intermingled with foliage plants in the surrounding garden beds for a wonderful tapestry of shapes and textures. The expansive borrowed scenery of Sydney Harbour makes for an idyllic backdrop and reduces the need to fill the space.



Feature plants

TREES

- Snow pear (*Pyrus nivalis*)
- Juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Spartan')
- Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)
- Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy')

SHRUBS

- Mexican lily (*Beschorneria yuccoides*)
- Native ginger (*Alpinia caerulea*)
- Rhaphirolepis* 'Oriental Pearl'
- Licorice plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*)
- Bay (*Laurus nobilis*)
- Japanese box (*Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica*)
- Gardenia augusta* 'Florida'
- Lilly pilly (*Syzygium* 'Straight and Narrow')
- Liriope muscari* 'Evergreen Giant'

PERENNIALS

- Plectranthus argentatus* 'Silver Shield'
- Sea lavender (*Limonium perezii*)
- Eyelash spur flower (*Plectranthus ciliatus*)

- White hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'White Ball')

- Mexican sage (*Salvia leucanthus*)

- Ajuga reptans* 'Catlin's Giant'

GROUNDCOVERS

- Kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*)

DESIGN NOTES

- Water feature Custom design with spun-copper bowl.
- Sandstone Capricorn Buff sandstone.
- Gravel Pea gravel.
- Driveway Hand-flamed Portuguese cobblestones.



ABOVE LEFT The strappy foliage of native ginger (*Alpinia caerulea*) contrasts with the foliage in neighbouring beds. ABOVE RIGHT Mexican lily, *Plectranthus ciliatus* and *Alpinia caerulea*. THIS IMAGE A reclaimed sandstone bench bordered by *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' is the perfect spot to experience the garden. OPPOSITE A dry-stacked sandstone wall guides the way to the pool area. The generous width allows it to double as seating. H&G