

HAPPY PLACE

Teaming a favourite old tree with luscious new plantings fulfilled a long-held dream for its owners: a 'home in a garden'.

STORY *Elizabeth Wilson* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Erik Holt*

Melbourne homeowners Lindy and Danny have always loved the generous size of their garden. It was the reason they bought this property, in the city's south-east, back in 2014. The original home, a 1980s red-brick dwelling, was liveable enough, but what really captured their hearts was the large block – just under 1000 square metres – and the gardenscape of hedging, lawn and roses. "We bought the house because of the garden," says Lindy. "We especially loved the elm tree at the back."

With a growing family – they now have four children aged between five and 14 – the couple always planned to renovate and expand the house, a transformation they finished earlier this year. The building works were extensive, comprising a new rear extension of steel and glass, and the cladding of the original house in black aluminium panels. Predictably, much of the original garden was trampled during the construction. Foreseeing this, Lindy and Danny had factored the installation of a new garden into the project. In fact, the garden was central to their vision for their new-look home. "Our brief to the architect was all about maximising views of the

An existing golden elm is the resplendent focal point in the new garden designed by Bethany Williamson. Deep garden beds like this one are filled with a mix of shrubs, perennials and grasses including (from left) *Plectranthus argentatus*, *Pittosporum tobira* 'Miss Muffet', *Agastache* 'Blue Boa', purple-flowering *Heliotropium arborescens* 'Lord Roberts', turf lily (*Liriope muscari*), German iris and catmint (*Nepeta* 'Walker's Blue'). A maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), left, is one of several feature trees. Boundary hedges are Portuguese laurel (side fence) and ornamental pear (back fence).



“We adore the sense of living in a beautiful garden.” **Lindy, owner**



garden, with the tree as a focal point,” says Lindy. “We felt strongly about having a beautiful garden to look at, and we wanted to be able to see it from every window.”

Their architect, David Neil of Neil Architecture, introduced Lindy and Danny to landscape architect Bethany Williamson, who they enlisted to create the perfect companion for their redesigned home. Their brief outlined their needs: an area for kids’ play and spaces for entertaining, plus new landscaping around the existing pool.

Bethany’s aim was to devise a garden that both complemented and embraced the architecture. “The house has a really strong presence on the site,” she says. “It was important that the garden match the style and feel of the home, but not take anything away from it. So I kept the palette simple – dark greens, silver-greens, with some purples, mauves and a little bit of white. Anything too colourful would have looked out of place against the house.”

Key to Bethany’s design are the “pockets of planting” that hug the house and lead through the garden. These are all generously sized beds – the largest is 9x3.8 metres – planted with a mix of low-level plants. There’s a blend of structural and soft-leafed species, both evergreens and perennials, with a focus on contrasting leaf textures. The upright foliage of German iris, for example, and the strappy leaves of liriopie sit next to tight mounds of *Pittosporum tobira* ‘Miss Muffet’; the delicate spikes of catmint (*Nepeta* ‘Walker’s Blue’) are mixed with velvety grey lamb’s ears (*Stachys byzantina*).

“The mixed planting produces really lovely combinations of foliage textures and forms,” says Bethany.

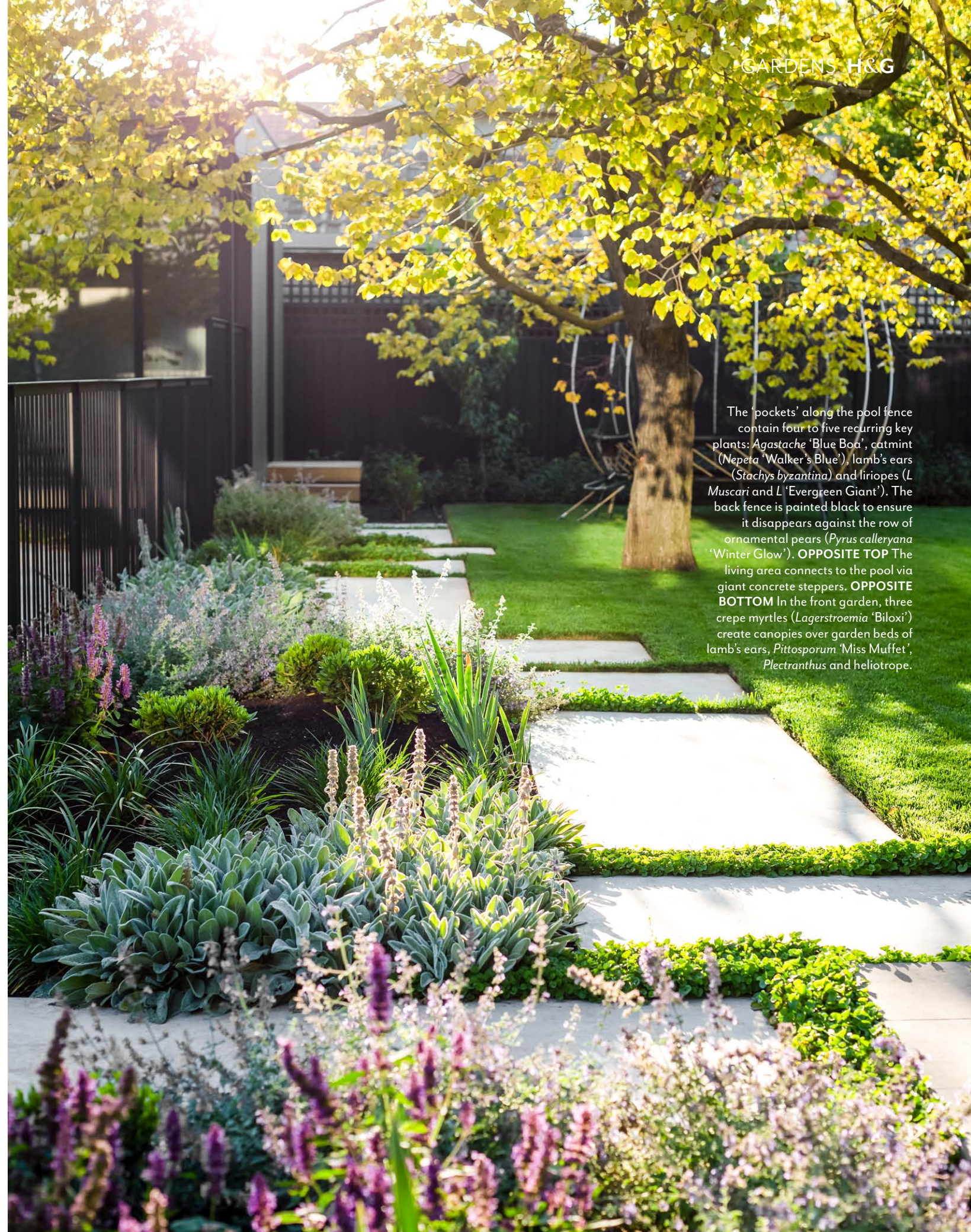
“The important thing was to ensure the plants in the beds didn’t block the views into the rest

of the garden, so the planting is mostly knee height. Only a few plants will reach as high as 1.2 metres and these are located around the edges of the beds.” Feature trees include a maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* ‘Dissectum Seiryu’) and, in the front garden, crepe myrtle (*Lagerstroemia* ‘Biloxi’).

To help shape and connect the garden beds, Bethany designed a series of concrete steppers, all 1-metre wide but in varying lengths, and planted lawn and kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*) between them. Poured on site, they create pathways through the garden. “The steppers link the beds,” says Bethany. “They needed to be large to be in scale with the house. I love using concrete like this. It has a soft feel to it and it looks better than a solid path.” Retaining an area of lawn in the rear garden was integral to Lindy and Danny’s vision. “We have fond memories of the children running around under the elm tree, so we wanted to keep lawn in that area.” Bethany chose tall fescue grass for softness underfoot; that magnificent golden elm (*Ulmus glabra* ‘Lutescens’) stands sentinel in the emerald carpet.

The family moved back into the house six months ago and enjoy their garden views every day. “We love the variety of plants – there’s always something interesting to look at,” says Lindy. “As much as we love the house and the interiors, we also really adore the sense of living in a beautiful garden.” **H&G**

Bethany Williamson Landscape Architecture;
bethanywilliamson.com.au.



The ‘pockets’ along the pool fence contain four to five recurring key plants: *Agastache* ‘Blue Boa’, catmint (*Nepeta* ‘Walker’s Blue’), lamb’s ears (*Stachys byzantina*) and liriopes (*L. Muscari* and *L. ‘Evergreen Giant’*). The back fence is painted black to ensure it disappears against the row of ornamental pears (*Pyrus calleryana* ‘Winter Glow’). **OPPOSITE TOP** The living area connects to the pool via giant concrete steppers. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** In the front garden, three crepe myrtles (*Lagerstroemia* ‘Biloxi’) create canopies over garden beds of lamb’s ears, *Pittosporum* ‘Miss Muffet’, *Plectranthus* and heliotrope.